

THE EPIC OF TEA

Politics in the Plantations of Sri Lanka



A.P. Kanapathypillai



K. Maryanathan

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POLITICS IN THE PLANTATIONS OF SRI LANKA

By

A.P. Kanapathypillai

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Dedicated to My Parents

Chapter 1

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PREFACE

Sri Lanka's plantation Tamil community has a history of being subjected to discrimination, and social and political exclusion, as well as of struggle against discrimination and for economic and political rights. Brought to Sri Lanka from south India to work first as migrant labour and then residential labour, their history is also closely intertwined with the development of Sri Lanka's modern, capitalist economy. Working in tea, rubber and coconut plantations, they have been the mainstay of Sri Lanka's economy for over one-and-a-half centuries.

Mr. P. Kanapathypillai's book *The Epic of Tea: Politics in the Plantations of Sri Lanka* covers some major facets of the social and political history of the plantation Tamil community. He begins his book with an account of the development of Sri Lanka's colonial economy since the mid-19th century, in order to provide the historical context for the emergence of plantation labour. Parallel to the historical narrative of the formation of the community, the book presents accounts of the trade union movement of plantation workers. Most important in these accounts are the details of strikes and other working-class struggles waged by the plantation workers during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Details given about specific strikes and events are of great importance to scholars as well as to political activists. The book provides a vivid picture of how the plantation Tamil community fought against discrimination and exclusion and waged a relentless struggle for equality, justice, recognition and inclusion within the nation-state of Sri Lanka.

The important aspect of Mr. Kanapathypillai's book is that it is an account of the plantation Tamil community from within, by a person who belongs to the community and who has been a political activist

and intellectual with organic links with the community's struggles for its rights.

At a time when Sri Lanka's minority rights discourse has suffered setbacks, the renewal of the argument for minority rights requires a new framework of political imagination, discussion and debate. Against this backdrop, integrating the struggles of minority communities with a broad political project of deepening democracy has now become crucially important. For such a venture, this book provides inspiration, because it reminds its readers that rights are outcomes of struggles and not consequences of philanthropy.

Professor Jayadeva Uyangoda

University of Colombo and Social Scientists' Association

1 August 2011

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Several individuals have encouraged me to author a book on the toiling workers in the plantations, since many people are not aware of their struggles to win their legitimate rights, firstly against the British colonialists and subsequently against the local bourgeoisie.

I am thankful to the Social Scientists' Association for publishing this work. I am indebted to Professor Jayadeva Uyangoda of the Colombo University for his exemplary preface, which in a nutshell spells out the objectives of this work. The manuscript was masterly read and corrected by Judy Waters Pasqualge and further perused and woven into a book by Rasika Chandrasekera; I am grateful to both of them. The invaluable advice of Dr. Kumari Jayawardena is a great motivation to students of politics like myself. My thanks are due to her.

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My friend S. Meiyathan of Hatton furnished me with the photographs that were used on the front and back covers. I was encouraged to complete this work by my friends Dr. W.A. Abeysinghe, a lawyer and journalist who is well-known in the Sinhala literary world and has authored nearly two hundred Sinhala books, including translations of Russian novels by well-known writers; my journalist friend Mr. Wanasinghe of Kandy; K. Velayutham of the United Plantation Workers Union; senior trade unionist P. Kandiah of Haputale; senior

journalist P. Rajaratnam of Nuwara Eliya; Marshal Perera, Presidents Council, of Badulla; M. Sivapalan, Education Officer Kotmale; Wijaya Wickramaratne, Presidents Counsel; and Lal Wijenaik, lawyer and politician, the latter two of Kandy.

Finally, a word of thanks to my wife Puwana and daughter Abirami for their unstinted support and cooperation to complete this work.

A.P. Kanapathypillai

2011

INTRODUCTION

The first contact between the Portuguese and the Kingdom of Kotte was was in 1505. During that period the kings were the largest landowners. The economy was one of barter, and the main source of cash income to peasants was from the sale of areca nuts. The means of production available for the agricultural economy was primitive. Land tenure was the main feature of the feudal relationship.

The Dutch, who succeeded the Portuguese, held a trade monopoly, and the Kandyan kingdom exported areca nut, cardamom and pepper. The Kandyan court and chiefs received a lesser income due to this monopoly. The Dutch discovered that cinnamon grew wild in the jungles; they found it to be a good natural product for export and commenced the cinnamon trade. The agricultural economy of the peasants continued, and they lived as surfs of the feudal elements, whose exploitation was inexorable. The Dutch also made profits through the liquor trade. It was during this period that the distilleries industry began to bring capital to certain indigenous persons, who later reinvested capital in the plantations.

When the British captured the country, this feudal economy was backward and the means of production primitive, the consequence of which was a stagnant economy. The government depended on the revenue generated through various taxes imposed on the population. The British, however, carried on the trade practices of the Dutch. At the same time, new class formations were evolving, due to the income derived from the liquor trade and through servicing the requirements of the bureaucracy.

The British wanted to open the gateway to the capitalist mode of production and, therefore, large tracts of land were made available to commence the cultivation of coffee, and later tea. Such land was made

available to entrepreneurs. Special laws were enacted to acquire lands belonging to peasants for use by coffee planters. The British investor was encouraged to invest in coffee cultivation on a commercial scale, and foreign bureaucrats serving in Ceylon also began to invest in coffee cultivation.

Cheap labour from neighbouring south India was readily available, and people were brought to Ceylon to work on the coffee estates. This caused considerable disturbance among the Kandyan peasantry, who had hitherto lived without alien people in their midst.

In the 19th century there arose a class of local merchant capitalist who profitted both directly and indirectly from the development of the plantation system. They were dependent on the British for their prosperity.

This book deals with the introduction of coffee and how and why the tea plantations came to exist. It deals with the plight of the people who had to trek their way into the interior of the island to reach their destinations to earn their livelihood. The first chapter deals with the routes taken by immigrant labour and the difficulties confronted by them in the process.

The manner in which capitalism came into existence and the capitalist mode of production operated can be presumed. However, it is the view of certain scholars that the tea industry during the 1830s and later did not bring about a fully developed capitalist system, but rather a nascent capitalist system. It is also their view that no comprador class existed, notwithstanding the presence of foreign entrepreneurs.

The early trade union movement in the plantations brought relief to the workers. It was arduous work to organize trade unions in the plantations, but the trade union movement gradually gained ground. It is pointed out in this book that a feudal system existed in the plantations, where workers were not organized. Trade unions were unknown to them, and they failed to comprehend the similar class character of the urban proletariat. Urban proletariat leaders were from the petty bourgeoisie, and could not coordinate the struggles of urban workers with those of plantation workers.

Plantation workers were considered as part of the proletariat, as explained by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*: “that the proletariat is the class of the completely propertyless who are compelled therefore to sell their labour to the bourgeois in order to obtain the necessary means of subsistence in exchange. This class is called the class of proletarians or the proletariat.”

The living conditions of plantation workers under British planters were appalling, and there was severe oppression and denial of basic rights. However, it has to be pointed out that while the predominant ideology of British residents in Ceylon at that time was conservative, there were also British colonial bureaucrats and professionals, educated in British universities, who had been influenced by new liberal currents of opinion in Europe. Moreover, many of the local intelligentsia, especially the Euro-Asians, were responsive to the ideological changes that were taking place in Europe with the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism. The impact of the French Revolution of 1789, and the influence of French Enlightenment thinkers (Rousseau, Voltaire and Montesquieu), the anti-feudal challenge to mercantilism (Adam Smith, Malthus and Ricardo), and the democratic theories of representative government and equality of opportunity (Jeremy Bentham and James Mill) were all keenly debated in the 19th century.¹

The philosophy of Karl Marx – his theory about the economic system of society and the doctrine of class struggle – was an impetus to new thinking on how to usher in a new social order. His *Das Kapital* was a historical and scientific work encompassing scientific socialist theories of conflict in society, the capitalist mode of production, laws of commodity production, the effects of the crisis of the capitalist system and its division into classes; it had an impact on liberal thinking.

The October Revolution of 1917 inspired many national liberation movements around the world and had a direct impact of the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, despite these changes in liberal thinking the world over, there was no discourse on these themes among the plantation workers.

The 1952 Hartal was confined to urban areas only. A large section of the working population, the plantation workers, were left out of the struggle, and the trade union movement could not integrate this sector of workers into a common struggle. The plantation workers were the most oppressed section of the population. However, their participation in the Hartal to manifest class solidarity was not forthcoming, due to their isolation by bourgeois trade union leaders. Correspondingly, there was no manifest class solidarity agitation by the urban working class when the plantation workers were disenfranchised by the ruling classes.

The role of the left movement in the early struggles of the plantation workers is pointed out in this book. History cannot ignore the role of left movements and the struggles waged by left forces to strive for the upliftment of the plantation workers. The many social reforms which benefitted plantation workers due to the struggles waged by the left movement are described.

This book also deals with electoral reforms regarding the plantation workers, their citizenship rights, and the role of their leaders to achieve reform. It is pertinent to point out that left leaders were in the forefront to agitate for the citizenship rights of plantation workers. Struggles were carried on within parliament and outside by left forces to win these rights.

Further subjects include: the split in plantation trade unions, the roles of the left movement and bourgeois leaders, the nationalization of tea plantations, and racial holocaust.

The contents of this book may not be perfect, but an attempt has been made to take the reader into the history of an oppressed people. The views expressed in this book may be controversial and not acceptable to everyone. Constructive criticism is welcome.

A.P. Kanapathypillai
Nuwara Eliya, August 2011

Endnotes

¹ Kumari Jayawardena, *Perpetual Ferment – Popular Revolts in Sri Lanka in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2010).

CHAPTER 1

THE PLANTATION ECONOMY UNDER BRITISH RULE

The British colonialists, with adventurist ambitions and a view to expanding their empire, captured many colonies and subjected their peoples. Sri Lanka, which had been ruled by many foreign powers, was captured by the British, and the entirety of the nation (then Ceylon) came under British imperial rule. The last king of Kandy (in Sinhalese called *Kanda Uda Rata*), Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe, who was engaged in infighting with his feudal chiefs, could not maintain the monarchy. Ehelapola Nilame had joined forces with the British and helped them to capture the king, leading to the takeover of the whole country in 1815.

When the British captured Ceylon, even the rudimentary traces of capitalism did not exist. Rather, there was a feudal, backward agricultural economy with primitive productive forces. The British Raj wanted to introduce the capitalist mode of production to enable the colony to produce sufficiently for the benefit of the colonial power. The British introduced schools that would cater to the training of personnel to administer the state. They promoted a religion that was akin to their faith and encouraged the local population to follow it.

The local populace was used as labour to construct roads. Capital began to accumulate in the hands of contractors, builders and others who provided services to the military. However, large-scale capital did not accumulate in the hands of individuals.

There were many people who accumulated capital through the mining, processing and export of graphite. Others profitted and accumulated capital by making investments in toll rents of bridges and ferries on the main highways. Investment in the arrack distillery trade was another means of accumulating capital.

Prelude to a New Mode of Investment

The colonial government had to invent means to increase production for the steady supply of capital to state coffers. Several factors were conducive to the introduction of export-oriented cultivation: climatic conditions, and the availability of large tracts of jungle land and cheap labour from south India.

Before the British conquest, people in the rest of the island did not have easy access to the Kandyan areas; British rule opened them up. The construction of the Colombo-Kandy road after 1820 was an important milestone for economic activity in the country.

Trends in South India

Tamil Nadu (then known as the Madras Presidency) was densely populated. The mass of people were living in semislavery conditions, as the link between peasant and landlord was one of slave and slave owner. Petty rulers and kings, and the landed gentry, had exploited the mass of people for generations.

Adventurous people, including the wealthy, who were desirous of acquiring and accumulating a greater amount of capital, sought to leave south India. The poorer sections of people migrated as workers to earn a meagre living, while others migrated to British colonies to obtain a higher standard of living or to bring home the capital acquired abroad. Their destinations included Sri Lanka, Burma, Fiji, Singapore-Malaysia, South Africa, Mauritius and the West Indies.

During the colonial period there were no trade or travel restrictions between British colonies, and therefore there was a liberal mobility of workers, artisans, traders and entrepreneurs from one colony to another. The Nattukottai Chettiars were one group of people who migrated to

Ceylon, originally to lend money on interest, which led to their later setting up banks and other monetary institutions. Among early settlers were the Malayalees. In Sri Lanka they worked as cooks, toddy tappers, teachers, businessmen, road workers and distillery trade workers.

Introduction of Coffee

Coffee originated in the Kaffa province of Abyssinia. Arabs introduced it to the world, including to Sri Lanka and the west coast of India. The British West Indian colonies were the largest supplier of coffee within the empire. However, when slavery was abolished, a substitute source of cheap labour could not be found. There was a gradual revision of the mercantile system of tariff protection, which had given preferential treatment to the West Indies. This revision culminated in the equalization of the British customs tariff on West and East Indian coffee entering Britain. At the same time, the decline of coffee production in the West Indies coincided with an increase in demand for coffee in Europe.¹

The British wanted to covert the precapitalist mode of production to the capitalist mode, and the avenues open to the comprador class were limited by the nonavailability of sufficient capital and the existence of the primitive mode of production. Capital and enterprise first came from British officials and entrepreneurs. The first experimental coffee garden was introduced by John Bird in Gannoruwa in 1824; in 1832 Governor Edward Barnes granted him 400 acres.² Coffee planter George Ackland, in his evidence before the British Parliamentary Committee on Ceylon, showed that on a single day in 1840 the following civil servants bought 13,275 acres of land in Ambagamuwa District, Central Province, as follows:

The Rt. Hon. J.S. Mackenzic, Governor	1,120
The Hon W.O. Carr (Puisne Justice) and Captain T. Skinner	862
F.P. Norris (Surveyor General)	762
G. Turnour (Government Agent, Central Province, and Acting Colonial Secretary)	2,217
H. Wright (District Judge, Kandy) and G. Bird	1,751
Sir Arbuthnot (Commander of the Forces) and Captain Winslow	855
T. Oswin (District Judge)	545
G.R. Buller (later Government Agent, Central Province)	764
Captain Layard	2,264
P.E. Woodhouse (Government Agent, Assistant Colonial Secretary)	2,135

In addition, Chief Justice Sir Anthony Oliphant owned a coffee estate in Nuwara Eliya, and Rev. J.M.S. Glennie owned 1,976 acres of land at Pussellawa.³

The early plantations were established near peasant villages. However, it was soon discovered that coffee grows best not on abandoned chena lands, but on land situated above 100 feet contour. The government was prepared to sell these lands for five shillings an acre to coffee planters. However, the entrepreneurs wanted clear legal title to the holdings to ensure security of investment. With the enactment of the Crown Land Encroachment Ordinance No. 12 of 1840 and No. 9 of 1841, these needs were fulfilled.⁴

To grow coffee on a commercial scale it was important to clear large tracts of virgin forest. Nurseries had to be provided for coffee seedlings. The plantation had to be weeded, and the berries plucked and harvested, usually during the period beginning in August and ending in November. The ripe berries had to be dried and sorted. A large workforce was usually needed at the time of plucking. Therefore, a large number of people from south India gravitated towards the coffee estates; they could work, try to save a little money and return home when it was time to harvest agricultural crops in south India, before the January festival season.⁵

In 1870 nearly 270,000 acres were planted with coffee, and berry picking needed 120,000 to 175,000 persons.⁶ However, when the coffee industry was flourishing, there was a severe recession in Britain, and planters were compelled to reduce production. Immigrant workers had to temporarily leave the island until conditions returned to normal.

Routes Taken by Workers to Reach the Plantations

The planting community wanted a steady supply of workers for the plantations, and they believed that it was the duty of the government to provide cheap modes of transport, especially since the government wanted to encourage private economic enterprise.

The journey to Sri Lanka across the Palk Strait was difficult and arduous. The workers, in groups, trekked through the arid sun-scorched plains of south India. When they reached the ports to cross the Palk Strait, they were tired, exhausted, starved and dehydrated. At the port they took catamarans or other country craft to cross to Mannar. The most popular route was the 210-mile trek from Mannar to Medawachchiya or Puttalam, then to Dambulla, Matale and Kandy.

During this travel they had little or no food. They drank water from stagnant pools and marshes in the jungles. Wild elephants, leopards and snakes invariably attacked them. They contracted such diseases as diarrhea, cholera, small pox, malaria, pneumonia and dysentery, and many succumbed.

As time proceeded there were two routes which immigrant workers chose, one of which was the north road. The Ceylon government Immigration Service operated ferries between Pamban on the south Indian coast and Mannar, a distance of about 20 miles. In Mannar the landing station was changed with the monsoons – Pesalai during the northeast monsoon and Vankalai during the southwest. From Mannar they had to walk approximately 150 miles. From Matale most of the immigrants travelled to the plantation districts by train, while those who lacked sufficient funds continued to walk.

The alternative route was by sea from Tuticorin in south India to Colombo, from where government railway facilities to the plantations

were available. The Tuticorin-Colombo immigrant traffic was mainly in the hands of the British India Steam Navigation Company, which in the 1880s operated weekly steamers between Tuticorin and Colombo. The Asiatic Steam Navigation Company also operated, but less frequently.⁷

To the planter and the worker the two routes had their advantages and disadvantages. It was thought that the Colombo route was relatively more convenient. However, the northern route entailed a short sea journey and low cost. The Pamban-Mannar crossing on a government vessel cost only 25 cents per adult, while the steamer between Tuticorin and Colombo cost Rs. 3. Further, the relative proximity of Matale on the north road to the plantation district meant a lower rail fare to the worker coming down the north road than to those coming by the sea route who had to board the train.⁸

Coffee Blight

The investment in coffee plantations was a fantasy of the comprador class to reap maximum profits, but the onset of the coffee blight prevented this. An agriculturist in 1833 wrote: "incited by the opening of the railways, by confidence and credit offered by bankers and the immense stimulus of 1873 when prices nearly doubled, purchasers flocked eagerly to take lands at pounds 20 per acre of forest and pounds 100 per acre of coffee."⁹

The blight (the workers called it *pooche* in Tamil) was first identified in the Madulsima region (Uva Province) in 1869 by Donald Reid, a planter. By 1875 the coffee blight had spread to the Pussellawa, Hewahetta and Rakwana areas. The yield from the diseased fields dropped from 6 cwt. to 2 cwt. per acre. By 1877 the annual export had dropped to 631,609 cwt. R.W. Jenkins, a reputed planter, said: "All the time, the leaf disease got worse and worse, and man got madder and madder, the prices got higher and the crops smaller and smaller."¹⁰

The coffee planters were alarmed at the situation and initiated discussions with the governor, who appointed Dr. Henry Marshal Ward (physician to the British battalion occupying Kandy in 1815) to study and report on the blight.¹¹ However, the effects were irreversible. Workers

returned home to south India. Many planters, too, left the island.¹² Due to the crisis, the Oriental Bank refrained from lending money.

Planting of Tea

Emperor Shan Nung of China, in around 2700 B.C., said:

Tea is better than wine for it leads not to intoxication, neither does it cause a man to say foolish things and repent thereof in his sober moments. It is better than water, for it does not carry disease, neither does it act like poison as water does, when wells contain foul and rotten matter.

The Chinese are well-known to have cultivated and used tea for a long period of time, like the Shan people of Burma and Siam. They spread this habit of drinking tea to the rest of the world, by inland routes to Eastern Europe and later by sea. In Japan, tea was used as a medicine.¹³

Although the British were used to drinking tea, little progress was made in its cultivation. However, rewards were offered to whoever produced the greatest quantity of the best Chinese tea in the British colony. In 1788 the eminent botanist Sir Joseph Banks reported to the East India Company that tea could be produced in India. The hill tribes of India drank tea, and this was disclosed to the authorities by Col. Lattar of the British forces.

The discovery of the indigenous India tea plant was made by Major Robert Bruce, who in 1823 discovered the plant growing wild in Assam. The prime mover in the early cultivation of tea, however, was his brother, Charles Arthur Bruce, a former naval officer and an explorer, who knew the people and had knowledge of the climate and topography. With the assistance of two Chinese tea makers, he mastered the art of making consumable tea. He produced tea in Calcutta, and his first shipment of eight chests in May 1833 was dispatched to London to be auctioned on 10 January 1834. The event created a sensation in London. The selling broker announced that each chest would be sold without a reserve to the highest bidder. The successful purchaser was

one Captain Pidding. The price rose from 16 shillings to 34 shillings per pound. The buyer was keen to purchase tea in order to encourage and offer relief to those responsible for tea production in Assam. W.H. Ukers says that the British cleared three million acres of jungle and cultivated tea, creating one of the most lucrative sources of private wealth and government tax returns in the empire.¹⁴

The earliest reference to tea in Ceylon was made by Christian Wolf, a native of Macklenberg, who arrived in Ceylon in about 1750 as a chaplain. In 1782 he wrote: "tea and some other sorts of elegant aromatic are to be found here. Some trials had been made to rear them but without success."

Captain Robert Percival, who was present at the capture of the island from the Dutch in 1796, said the following in an account of the island's natural produce:

It was not sugar alone that Ceylon seemed destined to afford to the general use of the western world; the tea plant has also been discovered native in the forests of the island. It grows spontaneously in the neighbourhood of Trincomalee and other northern parts of Ceylon. General Champagne informed me that the soldiers of the garrison frequently used it. They cut the branches and twigs and hang them in the sun to dry, then they take off the leaves and put them into a kettle to boil to extract the juice which has all the properties of that of the Chinese tea leaf. Several of my friends have assured me that the tea was looked upon as far from being bad, considering the little preparation it underwent. The soldiers of the 80th Regiment made use of it in this manner on being informed of its virtues and quality by the 72nd Regiment, whom they relieved. Many preferred this to coffee.¹⁵

He went on to say that neither the government of the day nor the public seems to have taken much notice of this fact until after the coffee enterprise became a failure. Even at that stage, Percival was convinced that Ceylon tea would supersede the use of both the Chinese and Assam types. According to Sir James Emerson Tennant, the Dutch were unsuccessful in their attempt to grow tea in Ceylon.

Assam tea was first introduced in 1839 during the governorship of Stewart Mackenzie. Dr. Trimen, director of the Peradeniya Royal Botanical Gardens, in his report published that year, said:

In December 1839 Dr. Wallich, the eminent Indian Botanist at that time as head of the Calcutta Botanical gardens sent to Peradeniya seeds of the then recently discovered *Indigenous Assam Tea*, and these were followed in February 1840 by 205 plants. In May, the Superintendent of Peradeniya Botanical Gardens Mr. Normansell, sent several plants to Nuwaraeliya and a person supplied to look after them. This was after representations were made to the government that tea was likely to prove a new profitable speculation, and a valuable source of revenue to the government. Again, in April 1842, another installment of Assam plants was received from Dr. Wallich, and in October some of these were sent to Mr. Mooyart at Nuwaraeliya with directions to cultivate them, but he was not sure as to what became of them.

By accident he (Mr. Normansell) met in London the gentleman to whose care they were committed, the Rev. E.F. Gapp, at that time tutor to the son of Sir Oliphant, Chief Justice of Ceylon. He informed that in October 1842 he received the plants from Mr. Mooyart at Nuwaraeliya, about thirty in number, and cleared a piece of jungle for them on Sir Anthony's land there; they were doing well when he left the island a few years after. Mr. Gapp thinks the ground was somewhere in the neighbourhood of the present Queens Cottage and it would be worth a search to discover whether some of the plants may not be still in existence.

Since writing the above, Mr. Gapp published these facts in a letter to the London Times dated 19th August. He is, however, mistaken in supposing the plants to have come from China. Some of the Nuwaraeliya plants were put out near Essex Cottage, now Naseby tea plantations.¹⁶

It should be noted that the description offered by Dr. Trimen seems to contradict the earlier theory of Mackenzie as to whether tea plants brought by Maurice Worms from China and planted on Rothschild Estate, Pussellawa, or a selection of indigenous Assam plants introduced by Mr. Llewellyn of Calcutta to Pennylan Estate, Dolosbage, were the first arrivals in the island. Some plants had been transferred from Rothschild Estate to Kotmale, but no methodical attempts had been made to cultivate them.

W.H. Ukers says: "The Worms brothers belonged to a remarkable family.¹⁷ The eldest, Solomon, was the first Baron de Worms, son of Benedict Worms of Frankfurt am Main, and his wife the eldest sister of the Baron de Rothschild. The brothers were traders and adventurers, and members of the London Stock Exchange. Maurice set sail for Ceylon in 1841 and Gabriel followed him the next year. They set themselves up in shipping and banking businesses, and Maurice planted coffee trees on Rothschild and Sogama estates at Pussellawa and on Condegala Estate (presently part of Labukelie Estate).

Rothschild estate at Pussellawa was at that time in extent of 2,000 acres, and it was a model estate to the planters. For well over 25 years Rothschild Estate tea set the standard for quality in the Mincing Lane auction houses. Thereafter, they opened Keenakelie in Badulla, Meddecombara in Dimbulla, Thotalagala in Haputale, Condegala and Labukelie in Nuwara Eliya, and Norwood in Dickoya; the total acreage was 7,318. They owned these properties for 24 years and then sold them to The Ceylon Company for Rs. 157,000.

P.D. Millie, another entrepreneur, claimed that he planted tea at Punduluoya in 1861. David Baird Lindsay claimed that he obtained Assam tea seeds in 1864 and planted them in Rajawela, Dumbara. The tea he manufactured was from trees six feet tall, and did not fetch a price at the Mincing Lane auctions, and Dumbara tea faded away.

Pioneer proprietor planters G.D.B. Harrison and W.M. Leake of Loolcandura Estate, Hewahetta, which was under the management of James Taylor, were well-known for producing the best tea. In 1866 on the instructions of Harrison, Taylor obtained tea seeds from Peradeniya Royal Botanical Gardens, and he planted them along the roadside in hedge-like rows. W.M. Leake was secretary of the Planters Association. He was an influential person, and it was his influence with the then governor that made the latter send Arthur Maurice, an experienced coffee planter, to India to inspect and report on the Assam tea districts. Having studied the report and being convinced, W.M. Leake ordered for his firm, Keir Dundans & Company, a consignment of Assam hybrid tea seeds, which were handed over to James Taylor. Taylor planted them in a clearing of 20 acres on Loolcandura Estate, Hewahetta.

Four years later James Taylor was able to sell his first lots of tea in the Kandy market, and in 1873, 23 pounds, valued at Rs. 58, were sent to London. Taylor had the acumen to manufacture tea, and credit has to be given to Mr. Jenkins, an Assam tea planter who knew the complexities in the manufacture of tea, under whom Taylor served. Taylor soon produced the best teas, equal or better than Assam tea in preparation and quality. The company often imported Indian tea seeds, and Loolcandura teas were considered and classed the best in the world. Loolcandura not only produced the best teas, but was an inspiration to all tea growers. In 1888, 20-year-old tea bushes were reported to be still growing vigorously. In 1891 Taylor himself observed: "tea fields were good as ever giving the same crop, it was fertilized once only with castor cake in the beginning of 1885."¹⁸

Many earlier pioneers of the coffee era were Scots, often from neighbouring villages or areas, who when coffee brought good revenue would convince others of a bright future for coffee in Ceylon. James Taylor, the father of the tea industry in Ceylon, was a Scotsman who hailed from Kindardincshire; he arrived in Ceylon when he was only 17 years old. The letter he signed as an assistant superintendent is reproduced below:

Messrs G.J. Hedden,
London,
October 1851.

Gentlemen,

I hereby engage myself to Mr. George Pride of Kandy, Ceylon, to a space of two years to act in the capacity of Asst. Superintendent, and to make myself generally useful, and obey the orders of those set over me at a salary of 100-say a hundred pounds per annum.

To commence from the time of my arrival on the estate, and to have deducted from my salary the amount of money advanced to me for my passage and freight.

I am Gentlemen

Your Obedient Servant,

James Taylor¹⁹

Taylor was taken on as a coffee planter, and he remained in Ceylon for 41 years, until his death on 2 May 1892.

Taylor's successor was G.F. Deen who, reporting on the same fields 27 years later, observed: "They are still full of vigour, showing no signs of decay and up to date the oldest tea fields have been giving yields at the rate of 471 pounds of made tea per acre. It is still flushing and yielding well."

Taylor's first attempt to cultivate tea was made in field no. 7 in Loolcandura Estate, Hewahetta. This field was neglected in later years. Towards the end of the 19th century, however, the owners, Anglo-Ceylon & General Estates Company, improved it and commenced plucking. The then superintendent Ray Cammeron was responsible for its speedy recovery, and it continues to flourish to this day.

Loolcandura had a total acreage of 3,290, divided into separate properties, namely, Waloya, which Taylor managed most of his life; Haranghewa, where Taylor started his planting career; and Gonavy, which was added later.

During the initial stages of tea planting, China Jat variety was widely used. It yielded good results, and the reports of the London brokers were quite favourable. Dr. Thwaites, the then director of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Peradeniya, was convinced of this hardy plant. Originally, doubts were expressed as to whether the Assam Jat variety could be cultivated above elevations where coffee was cultivated. The Assam variety was found to be flourishing at Hakgala Gardens in the 1860s. In 1872 Dr. Thwaites was convinced that this plant could flourish in mountainous areas.

With prospects of tea improving, and as capital was increasing and being accumulated in the hands of the British, more lands were cleared. The supply of planting material, however, was insufficient to cater to the needs of the planters. A large quantity of plants of both Assam hybrid and Chinese variety was distributed from Peradeniya and Hakgala Gardens during 1873 and 1874. However, the supply could not meet the demand. Therefore, the planters were compelled to import Assam tea seeds from India. This was costly, since tea seeds were sold at about

Rs. 50 to Rs. 80 per pound. In addition, plants were recovering from the coffee crash, and the cost of planting an acre of tea was very much higher than for planting an acre of coffee.

Subsequently, in 1882 sufficient quantities of tea seeds were imported from India. However, in 1892, due to a temporary depression, poor tea prices and adverse exchange rates, the planters found it difficult to purchase imported tea seeds from India. As time went on, enterprising tea planters produced tea seeds and grew their own plants, which was an additional source of income. Mr. Elphinstone, a pioneer coffee planter who later turned to be a tea planter, was very successful in the sale of tea seeds. In 1882 he was able to acquire an additional revenue of Rs. 16,000 from the sale of seeds obtained at Nagatenne group, Dolosbage.

In mid-1875 tea was grown in 13 of the 37 planting districts then recognized. However, as at that time there were no tea plantations to the north of Kandy or in Uva, the most popular areas were Nuwara Eliya and Kotmale. In that year, when James Taylor had planted 100 acres in Loolcandura in Hewahetta Lower, Jenkins at Hope Estate in Hewahetta Upper cultivated 136 acres of tea. Rockwood Estate and Mooloya Estate east of Loolcandura, and LeVallon and Stellenberg estates to the south, were also cultivated with tea, removing coffee. This cluster of tea estates forms the present Hewahetta tea planting district.

The area under tea cultivation increased from 350 acres in 1874 to 1,080 acres in 1875, and to 32,000 acres in 1883. Nuwara Eliya District was the cradle of tea plantations. The leading planter in the district was L.A. Rossiter, who in 1875 owned 203 acres. Rossiter was the proprietor planter of Fairyland Estate (350 acres), Hazelwood Estate (18 acres), Oliphant Estate (150 acres), and Florence Estate in Kotmale (100 acres of prime tea land), with Alston & Company as agents. He purchased several tea lands, one of which was Ratnilakelle (renamed Great Western) at Talawakele. Pedro Estate, Nuwara Eliya (35 acres), was owned by F. Bayley. Tillibody Estate (50 acres) was owned by G. Armitage; both were under the supervision of E.A. Watson.

James Taylor was of immense assistance to planters, and he guided them. Several planters published books containing valuable information about tea, which were published by the Ceylon Observer Press. William Cameron, a retired Assam tea planter, advised the planters on improved techniques of pruning and plucking. The Practical Scientific Institution in the Peradeniya Royal Botanical Gardens and Hakgala Gardens were immensely helpful to planters.

By 1875 tea was grown commercially and by 1890 tea was dominant in all plantation districts. The following table shows the progressive increase in tea planting.

Year	Acreage
1875	1,080
1880	9,274
1890	220,000
1900	384,000
1910	385,000
1920	404,500
1930	478,000

Source: *Ferguson Ceylon Directory*, 1938.

The plantation worker is the kingpin in the entire episode of the tea industry. They are the proletariat – modern wage-earning workers – who have no means of production of their own and are reduced to selling their labour power to live. If not for the plantation proletariat, the jungle lands could not have been cleared to plant coffee and then tea.

Slavery, misery, exploitation and other untold hardships were the order of the day. If not for the sacrifice of blood, sweat and tears by the plantation workers of earlier years, British planters could not have been successful entrepreneurs, and today's tea plantations would not exist.

The planting of tea was a good substitute for coffee, and it was proved that the tea industry was as lucrative as coffee and a mode for accumulating more capital. The conditions of the workers who arrived

in Sri Lanka remained the same or worse, while British entrepreneurs continued to invest in large-scale tea plantations. During the early period, primitive modes of transport, such as the bullock cart, prevailed. However, due to the compelling need, new modes had to evolve to enable the shipment of commercial produce to ports, in particular new roads and the railroads. Plantation and other workers were employed to work on building these. Advances in transport soon saw trains and motor vehicles used in the transport of tea.

The planters needed a permanent work force on the estates, and the indigenous population was not amenable to such work. In addition, local peasants were tied to their individual plots of land, under the continuing feudal system. The British also were suspicious of this sector, due to its links to the land.

System of Worker Recruitment

For many years the colonial governments in Sri Lanka and India had corresponded about the protection and welfare of the workers who migrated. In 1896 the Madras government suggested that the Sri Lanka government maintain a separate register of details concerning the workers transported in government vessels. In 1900 India requested details of wages paid to the workers. In the same year the Madras government requested that Sri Lanka improve the immigration camp that it had set up on the south Indian coast at Tataparai.²⁰

The question of worker well-being was taken up with the colonial government when a Catholic priest in North Arcot submitted a petition alleging ill treatment of certain workers by a *kangany* (worker recruiter) on an estate in Sri Lanka. Thereafter, the Indian Labour Ordinance was enacted in 1884. These recruiters usually travelled with their gangs of workers from south India to the plantation districts. Workers were subjected to various irregularities, especially heavy arrears in wages, even nonpayment at times, fraud and extortion. Recruiters usually chose to travel via the north road, avoiding the steamer, in order to spend as little as possible on the journey, thus retaining a larger portion of the advances given by workers. The following table shows worker arrivals in Sri Lanka and the routes taken.

Year	Arrivals via the North Road	Arrivals via the Tuticorin-Colombo Route	Percentage via the Tuticorin-Colombo Route
1880	20,800		
1881	27,400		
1882	26,600		
1883	15,600		
1884	20,500		
1885	24,000		
1886	18,000		
1887	24,000		
1888	51,800		
1889	34,100	4,970	13
1890	40,700	15,000	27
1891	47,700	26,000	36
1892	45,600	37,300	46
1893	34,500	20,400	36
1894	29,100	21,000	42
1895	31,400	50,200	61
1896	28,300	60,500	68
1897	27,500	95,600	78
1898	17,400	73,800	84
1899	3,500	23,700	85
1900		128,700	100

Source: Superintendent of Immigration, *Returns of Immigrants in the Port of Colombo* (Published biannually, 1880-1900), in D. Wesumperuma, *Indian Immigrant plantation Workers in Sri Lanka*, Table 2.

Wages of Plantation Workers (1886-1910)

It is difficult to ascertain the daily wage of plantation workers during the above period. The Ceylon government *Blue Books* contain the daily wage rate in the different planting districts, but these are not accurate.²¹ In 1878 the Ceylon Planters Association attempted to obtain such information from the district planters associations. In 1907 the government's Labour Commission gathered information from persons who appeared before it, mostly planters.

The Indian Estate Labour Ordinance No. 11 of 1865 and No. 13 of 1889 stipulated that wages be fixed on the basis of contracts with employers. However, there was no forum for negotiation between employer and employee, and planters fixed the wage rate unilaterally, in particular via their district planters association.²²

Planters had to assure a wage that was above the cost of living in order to maintain the industry. Thus, the price of rice was a crude index of the cost of living used to fix the daily wage rate. In the early 1880s it was determined that a sufficient daily rate was 33 cents for men and 25 cents for women, based on a six-day week, and provided that the price of rice supplied to workers was Rs. 4 per bushel.

The wage rate paid in the low country area and Kelani Valley were below the standard rate. The reason for this was that tea produced there fetched lower prices. However, in these areas planters could offer more work due to a more favourable climate.

During the years when coffee prospered, workers were offered 5 to 6 days of work per week, or 20 to 24 days per month. This average was maintained in the period 1878-1879. During the depression, only 3 to 4 days per week were offered.

Planters required a certain minimum of work days in order to qualify for a weekly rice quota. If a worker did not reach the minimum, the quantity of rice was proportionally reduced. When yield was high, workers were required to work more days.

During the period 1886-1887 planters maintained tea acreage at the maximum level of production, and also brought new land under cultivation annually. Planters could thus offer more days of work. However, during the 1898-1901 slump, the volume per worker declined. T.N. Christie, a leading planter, one time representative of planting interests in the Legislative Council and sympathizer of workers, wrote: "It might be that owing to periods of short flush and larger too larger labour supply ... too short work had been given."

Planters also offered incentives to encourage extra work. One popular incentive was cash payment, which was made at the end of the day if the worker worked on a Sunday, or for overtime work at the end of the day, or for exceeding a specified number of pounds plucked. Another incentive was a bonus to workers who worked six days per week. Still another was an extra day's pay if the worker worked a number of days specified by the planter.

The following table shows data on average daily wages (in cents), where information is available.

District	1878-1879		1881		1890		1900	1908	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	male	Male	Female
Ambagamuwa	33-77	25-29	32	25	32	25	average 33	33	25
Badulla	33-37	25-29	35	25	37	29		35-37	25-29
Dolosbage	33	25	33	25	33	25			
Dickoya	37	27-29	33	25	33	25	female average 25	33	25
Dimbulla	32-37		32-36	25-30	33	25		33	25
Maskeliya		25-29	33	25	33	25			
Haputale	35-40	25-29	37		37			33-37	
Kotmale	33-37	35						33	25
Matale	30-33	25						33	25
Uda Pussell- awa	32-37	25-29						33	25
Yakdessa	33-37	25-29	33	33	33	25			
Rakwana	33-37							33-37	
Kalutara			30-33	30-33	30-33	20-25		32-33	25
Kelani Valley			30-39	30-33	30-33	20-25		33	25

Endnotes

¹ The import duty on coffee to England was 6d per pound for West Indian and 9d per pound for East Indian coffee. In 1835 the import duty was equalized at 6d. Dharmapriya Wesumperuma, *Indian Immigrant Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Sri Lanka National Library Services Board, 1986), 4; and L.A. Mills (1993), 227. Vanden Drisen gives the following statistics on coffee imports to England from the West Indies and Sri Lanka (weight in pounds). I.H. Vanden Drisen, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (London: 1954), 20, in Wesumperuma, 4.

Year	West Indies	Sri Lanka
1827	24,419,598	1,792,448
1837	15,557,88x	6,756,848
1847	5,259,449	19,475,904

² K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2005) (1964), app 28-29, in Wesumperuma, 5; and K.M. de Silva, in S. Nadesan, *A History of the Up-Country Tamil People in Sri Lanka* (Kandy: A. Nandalala Publication, 1993).

³ K.M. de Silva, in Nadesan, 25.

⁴ Wesumperuma.

⁵ Maxwell Fernando, *The Story of Ceylon Tea* (Colombo: Mlesna Limited, 2000).

⁶ Fernando.

⁷ Wesumperuma.

⁸ Wesumperuma.

⁹ S.N. Breckenberg, *The Hills of Paradise: British Enterprise and the Story of Plantation Growth in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Stamford Lake Publications, 2011), 105.

¹⁰ Breckenberg.

¹¹ Breckenberg, 106.

¹² Nadesan.

¹³ For information in this section, see Fernando, 49-52, 54, 55, 58, 60, 65.

¹⁴ W.H. Ukers, *All About Tea* (1935), in Fernando.

¹⁵ Fernando, 50.

¹⁶ Fernando, 51-52.

¹⁷ Ukers, in Fernando.

¹⁸ Fernando, 65.

¹⁹ Fernando, 65.

²⁰ Wesumperuma, 28-29.

²¹ Wesumperuma, 42.

²² Wesumperuma, 146.



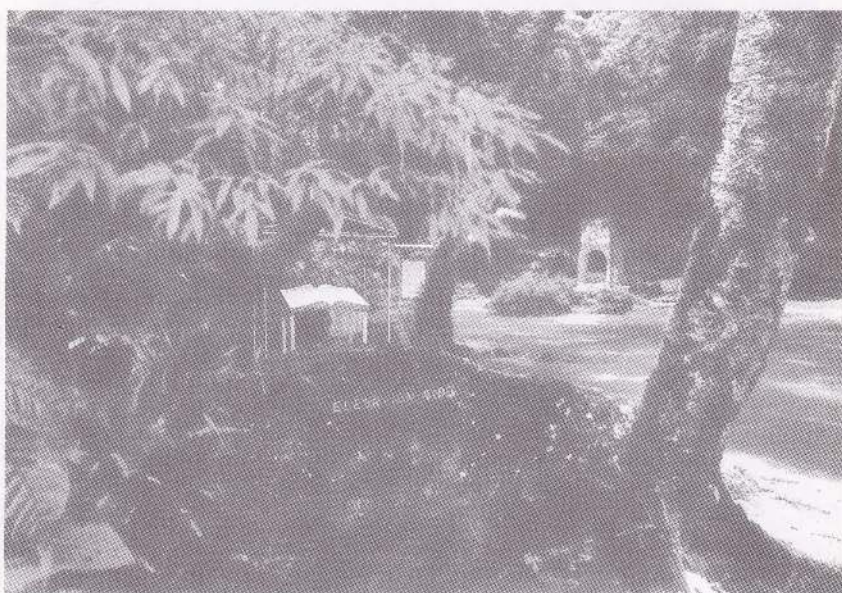
A Coffee Plucker



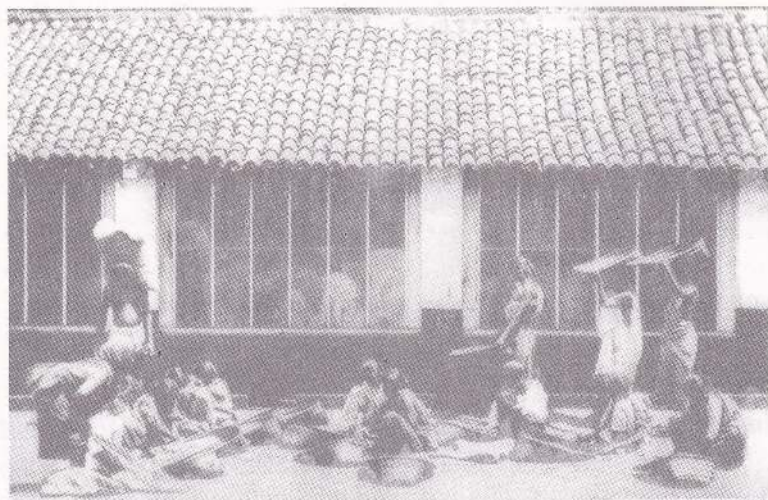
The Coffee Berries Dried In The Sun & Flesh Removed In Pulping House



The signboard presently seen on Loolcandura Estate. Courtesy: The Story of Ceylon Tea by Maxwell Fernando



Site of James Taylor's log cabin



Top: The coffee is dried in the sun and the flesh removed in the pulping house

Bottom: Workers with traditional pestles making coffee powder for the local bazaar

CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM AND THE PLANTATIONS

When the plantation system was introduced in the 1830s, the Sri Lankan economy was precapitalist, primitive and rudimentary in character, with the export of a few natural products, and a low level of trading and shipping activity. There was low productivity in agriculture and few manufactures. Not only did the foreign trading company and administration continue a policy of restrictive state monopolies, they also limited their demands to goods already provided by the existing economic system – namely, the natural products of land and sea. Thus, the impact of foreign merchant capital on the prevailing economy was limited. As a result there were no major innovative economic or social changes in the Asian colonies in the mercantilist phase; on the contrary, European merchants adapted to existing structures.¹

The feudal system and primitive productive forces in relation to landlord and peasant provided for no growth of capital in this system. The local bourgeoisie enhanced their capital through the liquor trade, and river and road toll rents. With the advent of immigrant labour, two new classes evolved. First, with the introduction of machinery, mechanics and technicians were required. The harbour had to be expanded, and more labour was needed. Eating houses, bakeries, shops, bazaars, garment manufacturers all needed workers, and thus a proletariat evolved. At the same time, the number of bankers (including money lenders, such as the Nattukottai Chettiars and bahais), planters and businessmen increased. Thus, another new mercantile capitalist class evolved. It should be noted that this class was multiethnic in character.

The plantation economy needed a large and wide infrastructure to cater to the needs of coffee planters, and later tea planters. Governor Barnes commenced the construction of roads, not only for the transport of plantation produce, but also for military expediency. The Colombo-Kandy road was started, as well as roads connecting Kandy to Kurunegala, Nuwara Eliya and Matale. Roads from Kurunegala to Ambepussa and Dambulla were constructed in the 1820s and early 1830s, totalling over 300 miles. Several important bridges were built during this period, including the Bridge of Boats over the Kelani river and bridges at Hingulla, Nanuoya and Mawanella. In the 1830s, during the tenure of Governor Robert Wilmot Horton, 257 miles of roads were constructed linking many parts of the island with Colombo and Kandy. By 1867 the country had 2,344 miles of roads, incurring an expenditure of Rs. 322,000.

The first railway line was the Colombo-Kandy line, which was completed in 1867. This line was of immense use to coffee planters in the Central Province. The line was extended to other coffee planting regions of the Central and Uva provinces. A railway line was extended to Matale in 1880. The northern line to Jaffna and the southern coastal line to Matara were completed. The lines to Chilaw, Puttalam and the Kelani valley were subsequently built, mainly due to vested and regional economies. By 1905 there were 488 miles of railway lines in the island.

The expansion of the coffee trade necessitated the upgrading of the harbour and port. The port of Colombo was developed in the 19th century; several breakwaters were constructed and the deep-water area was enlarged, making Colombo one of the largest artificial harbours in the world. A graving dock was also built, and by the early 20th century it was claimed that, with regard to the tonnage of vessels calling, Colombo was the third largest harbour in the British empire and the seventh in the world.

Large construction undertakings on government buildings, roads, ports and railroads, and the supply of timber, building materials and railroad sleepers provided good economic opportunities to Sri Lankans. The Colebrooke-Cameron reforms abolished compulsory labour. Thus,

labour for the construction of roads and railroads had to be hired on a wage payment basis. This opened opportunities for local cart contractors to provide the necessary goods transport, and for labour contractors to organize the supply of workers for loading and unloading at the port of Colombo. These activities also provided a basis for some industries operated by Sri Lankans. Among the goods produced were timber for construction work, sleepers for railway tracks, telegraph poles, furniture, wooden casks for coffee, and arrack. Most of these industries were located in the southwestern maritime area where there were skilled carpenters and craftsmen.

The retail trade in the coffee districts was an important mode of accumulation of capital. Shops and small stores provided food, clothing and other necessities to the growing number of plantation workers and to other migrants who worked on the roads, railways and buildings. Another mode of accumulation of capital was toll rents on roads, bridges and canals. Toll rents were most profitable in regions where economic activity was linked to the plantations. The following table shows such rents for 1861, when coffee cultivation was at its peak.

Province	Amount
Western	37,966
Central	13,749
Southern	3,138
Eastern	166
North Western	2,430
Northern	921
Total	58,370

Source: *The Ceylon Directory* 1863.

The above table shows that the Western Province and Central Province were economically active regions.

The increase in trade along the Colombo-Kandy road is seen in the 68% increase in these rents over a seven-year period from 1855 to 1862.

Toll	1855	1862
Bridge of Boats	4,655	7,910
Aluthgama	3,000	5,184
Ambepusse	3,052	5,012
Anguruwella	2,761	4,723
Mawanella	2,601	4,456
Peradeniya	2,980	4,405
Total	19,049	31,960

Source: *The Ceylon Directory* 1863.

The liquor trade became a perennial source of increase in the accumulation of capital. As more migrants from south India arrived, the liquor trade thrived. The construction of thoroughfares and other infrastructure projects led to an increase in the urban proletariat, and a corresponding rise in liquor production. Liquor consumption also increased among peasants. Fluctuations in the coffee industry, and unrest and rebellion among the peasantry, also influenced the demand for liquor and its price. Manufacture, sales and profits were closely related to the coffee industry and its migrant workers.

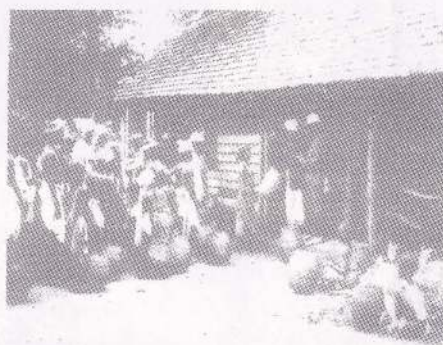
Generally speaking, the expansion of the plantation economy and the development of transport were the two key factors affecting the liquor trade. As it expanded, it served as an increasing source of capital for the local bourgeoisie. In 1833 the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms introduced administrative changes. The country was divided into five provinces, each under a government agent and several assistant government agents. In comparison to the pre-1830 period, arrack renters in the Central and Western provinces saw their fortunes rise with the new access to three markets – peasants, and plantation and urban workers.

Endnotes

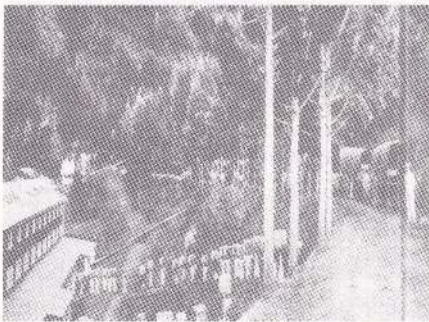
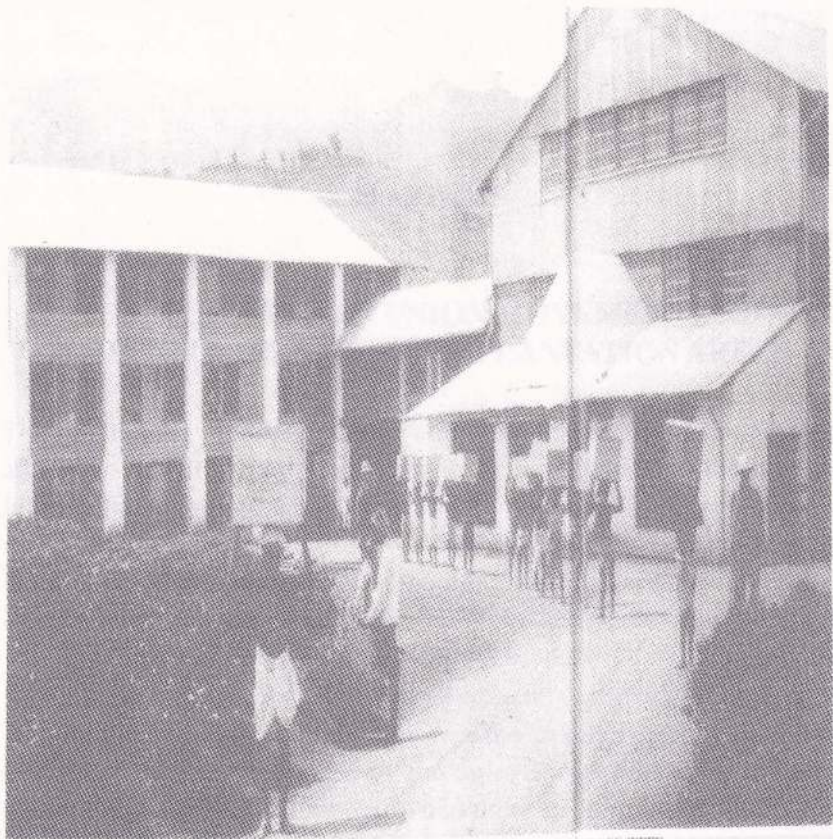
¹ Most of the information in this chapter is from Kumari Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2000).



Tea pluckers in the early days



Weighing sheds: early times (top); 1920s (center); 1990s (bottom right)



Transporting tea in the early days: loads were carried on the head to the roads, and by bullock carts to the railway station.

CHAPTER 3

THE EARLY TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND POLITICAL TRENDS IN THE PLANTATION AREAS

The relationship between planter and worker was essentially feudal, and there was little or no link between the two, other than through an intermediary, the *kangany*.¹ There was no awareness among workers regarding organizing themselves through trade union activity to demand their just rights. In urban areas a vibrant trade union movement existed, but urban trade union leaders did not try to unite the plantation workers in joint action to fight for their demands.

In the city of Colombo, workers were more organized, and there were often strikes. The first strike was the printers strike at Cave & Company. This was followed by the tramway car strike and the cart strike. These were all successful. When there were strikes in Colombo, planters feared their spread to the plantations. During the 1923 general strike in Colombo, planters prevented workers from travelling to the city out of fear that they would be infected with strikers' attitude of mind.²

In the 1920s, when there was severe labour agitation and unrest, there were still no trade unions or friendly societies in the plantation areas. However, there was an organization of clerks and minor supervisory staff who worked on the plantations, the Kelani Valley Indian Association. This organization demanded that weekly wage payments be made directly to the workers, but the controller of Indian immigrant labour claimed that the association must prove that it had an interest in labour. The controller further stated that the association

existed only to promote its president's candidacy to a nominated Indian seat in the Legislative Council.³

The plantation workers were an economically backward and severely exploited lot. In 1930 the agent of the government of India observed that indebtedness was the "most distressing feature" of the plantation worker's life. "Thousands of Indian workers are perpetually in debt. Their debts go on increasing in inverse proportion to their ability to pay them. Workers indebtedness which may have had small beginnings becomes acute, chronic and well nigh incurable."⁴

Gradually, as time passed, the *kangany* lost his grip over the workers. Legislation was introduced, and some of these ills were removed. The 'tundu' system, whereby a *kangany* could transfer his work gang from one plantation to another, was abolished in 1921. *Kanganies* were prevented from recovering debts in the courts. Under the Minimum Wage Ordinance of 1927, wages had to be paid directly to the workers and the rates were increased. The migratory nature of the plantation workers declined, and by 1920 most were permanently resident in Ceylon, thus acquiring the characteristics of wage labour.

Plantation workers had no franchise rights. For the rest of the population the franchise was determined by income, property holding and literacy qualifications. However, two members of the Legislative Council were nominated by the governor to represent Indian interests. The Donoughmore Commission recommended that the franchise be granted to all adults on the plantations, but this was opposed by most Ceylonese politicians, since they feared that plantation voters would gain more influence in those areas.

Many men opposed extending adult franchise to women. Agnes de Silva was part of a delegation from the Women's Franchise Union to the Donoughmore Commission on Constitutional Reforms.⁵ Her views were the most radical among the women's delegation: "we went in the form of women's crusaders and answered questions that we had not prepared. I remember one now. Lord Donoughmore asked if I wanted Indian Tamil women labourers on the estates to have the vote. I replied - certainly, they are women too."⁶

Since Ceylonese politicians (other than those of the left) opposed granting voting rights to plantation workers, the eligibility to vote was changed from residential qualification to one of 'domicile.' Persons who were not domiciled in Ceylon had to satisfy either a literacy or property qualification, or obtain a 'certificate of permanent settlement.' As a result of these events, about 100,000 Indians acquired the right to vote.

In 1931, for the first time, the plantation workers participated in the mainstream of national politics. Electioneering was keenly conducted in the plantation areas, and two persons of the Indian Tamil community, Peri Sunderam and S.P. Vaithilingam, were elected to the State Council to represent Hatton and Talawakele, respectively, while a planter, A. Fellowes Gordon, was elected to the Bandarawela seat. Peri Sunderam was appointed as minister of labour, industry and commerce in the State Council. These changes brought some awareness among the workers; they began to see that their counterparts in the city were organized and were winning their rights and more freedom.

One factor that demonstrates the willingness of plantation workers to be unionized was their support for the introduction of schools on the estates. The education system on the plantations was below par, when compared to the rest of the country. After the passage of the Education Ordinance in 1920, education was made compulsory for children on the plantations, and planters provided an elementary-level vernacular education. In 1904 there were only 2,000 children at such schools; by 1920 the number was 11,000; and by 1930, 26,000.⁷ There was an advance in literacy. The 1921 census figures show a 18% literacy rate (males 27.6%, females 7.1%), as compared to 12.37% in 1911.⁸

The workers became more empowered and informed, and were in a position to challenge the arbitrary attitude of the *kangany*. In 1908 the Labour Commission recorded that workers often had little knowledge of the amounts they owed the *kangany*.⁹ By the 1920s, however, many workers were able to keep accounts of their indebtedness and wages. They had access to Tamil books and literature. They were able to follow the nationalist movement in India, and this had a great impact, as did the visits of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in 1927 and 1931, respectively.

Although the labour movement advanced in urban areas, there was no such parallel movement in plantation areas. In an earlier period religion was used as a tool to develop political and labour activity, but, again, there was no such trend on the plantations. The Hindu faith did give courage to workers to come to terms with not only the adverse environment, but also with oppression, ignorance and poverty. Ponnambalam Arunachalam, in a talk on Indian immigration, mentioned the consoling influence of Hinduism on Indian indentured labour in Fiji, who lived in "degrading and miserable conditions ... amid squalor physical and moral."¹⁰

Even in the late 1920s, when educated people and middle-class Tamils were sympathetic and concerned about living conditions, oppression and exploitation of plantation workers, the Hindu religion was not made use of to agitate for their rights. Religion never replaced the trade union movement in the plantations; it was never used as a facade for trade union activity.

In the late 1920s educated and middle-class Tamils with a radical outlook gave leadership to the trade union movement in the plantations. However, it should be noted that many Tamils were disinterested in plantation labour problems, although moderate Tamils joined the struggles of the movement for political reform. The first person to show such concern was Ponnambalam Arunachalam, who between 1913 and 1922 campaigned against certain clauses of the Labour Ordinance and protested against the poor wages and the inhuman living conditions of the plantation workers.¹¹

Endnotes

¹ *Kangany* denotes the person who had charge and overall control over persons who were brought from India to Ceylon. The *kanganies* tended to treat workers like chattel, and their relationship was feudal and tribal. The *kangany* exploited the workers. The white superintendent paid the *kangany* depending on the number of workers under this charge. This payment was described as pence money. The word *kangany* is used in the plantations even now. However, under the Industrial Disputes Act, a *kangany* is merely an ordinary worker, although he has supervisory power in the field over the other workers.

² Statement of Graeme Sinclair, *Planters Association Year Book 1923*, in Kumari

Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 333.

³ Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon*, 333.

⁴ *Annual Report of the Agent of the Government of India in Ceylon 1930*, in Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon*, 333.

⁵ Kumari Jayawardena, *Erasure of the Euro-Asian* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2007), 230.

⁶ Agnes de Silva was the daughter of Paul Nell and his wife Alice Newman. She was born in 1884 and spent her early days in a tea plantation in Pussellawa. She hailed from a distinguished Burgher family, and was a radical who was against oppression and all forms of social exploitation, bourgeois traditions and so-called middle-class respectability. She broke from tradition, and in 1908 married George E. de Silva, a Sinhalese lawyer with humble social origins who was involved in politics.

Her ambition was to enter Cambridge University, however, she could not pursue higher studies. She worked as an executive member of the Ceylon Labour Party and the All Ceylon Trade Union Congress led by A.E. Goonesinha. She was an active member of the Kandy Arts and Crafts Society, with the view of encouraging local artisans. The Women's Franchise Union was formed in 1927, with Agnes as one of its joint secretaries. In 1925 at the sessions of the Ceylon National Congress she proposed a resolution that a limited suffrage be immediately extended to women. She was supported by George E. de Silva and A.E. Goonesinha, but many others opposed her moves. Agnes was a progressive person who worked closely with local and foreign politicians. She was one of the organizers who was responsible for hosting Ramsay McDonald, leader of the British Labour Party. She also hosted in 1927 Mahatma Gandhi and his wife Kasthuribha, and in 1931 Jawaharlal Nehru, his wife Kamala, Indira Gandhi, and two well-known women congress leasers, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and her sister-in-law Sarojini Naidu. Sarojini Naidu stayed for some time as Agnes' guest in her home in Kandy, where they discussed many issues concerning woman and franchise rights. Jane Russell has written about this encounter, and how Sarojini's ideas rubbed off on Agnes, who had long nurtured suffragette ambitions. Subjects discussed included: the women's movements in Britain and India, and the implications for Ceylon; the iniquities of the dowry system and arranged marriage; intercaste and intercommunal marriage; the need for education for women; the right to vote; and the need for women to have a profession outside of motherhood. Jane Russell. In 1933 Agnes unsuccessfully contested the Galagedera electorate at a by-election as a Ceylon Labour Party candidate. She polled 4,565 votes, while her opponent P.R. Ranaraja polled 6,764. Jayawardena, *Erasure of the Euro-Asian*, 230, 231, 233.

⁷ For 1904 figure, E.B. Denham, *Ceylon at the Census*, 410. For the 1920 and 1930 figures, *Annual Report of the Agent of the Government of India in Ceylon*, 1931.

⁸ Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon*, 335.

⁹ Labour Commission Report, 1908, in Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon*, 335.

¹⁰ On this question, Arunachalam quoted the Rev. C.F. Andrews, who had made a study of Indian labour in Fiji. "The religious sense among the people ... the tree of Hindu Civilisation ... I have found here in Fiji among indentured coolies, Hindu men and women, whose hearts are filled with poetry and nature and love of God ... One of them told me that everything that God had made was beautiful in Fiji and man alone was vile. We knew which man he meant ... Through all the evil and misery of their fate they have kept the soul of goodness."¹¹ Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon*, 336, 337.

CHAPTER 4

NATESA AIYAR AND THE INTRODUCTION OF TRADE UNIONS

Natesa Aiyar was a radical politician who wanted to mobilize the plantation workers by introducing the trade union movement to the plantations. He was a journalist whose attack on the authorities was vitriolic. He joined A.E. Goonesinha, a pioneer urban trade union leader, and was instrumental in leading several agitations in the urban sector.

Natesa Aiyar, who was from south India, had functioned as a government servant in Tanjore. He visited Ceylon in 1915 to make contacts and collect subscriptions for his newspaper. In 1920 he returned to Ceylon and became the editor of a newspaper known as *Thesa Nesan*. The proprietors of this newspaper were M.A. Arulanandam and Dr. E.V. Ratnam. They were both committee members of the Ceylon National Congress. Dr. Ratnam was also a committee member of the Ceylon Labour Union. They also published an English paper, *The Citizen*, which was edited by Lawrie Muthukrishna, with Aiyar as publisher.¹

The person who influenced Aiyar in trade unionism was D.M. Manilal, an Indian nationalist and a communist, who hailed from Baroda. After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, many Ceylonese radicals were influenced by the Russian Revolution. However, communist literature was prohibited. The Indian communists found Ceylon to be a safe haven to smuggle in communist literature. Manilal was called to the bar in London in 1907 and was closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi. He practiced law in Mauritius from 1907 to 1910. During his stay in Mauritius he was instrumental in organizing the Indian workers

to agitate for their rights. In 1910 he went to India as a delegate to the Indian National Congress; he denounced the appalling living conditions and economic misery of the Indian workers in Mauritius and urged the abolition of Indian emigration to the island. He then worked in South Africa, along with Mahatma Gandhi, and on the advice of the latter left for Fiji. The authorities later deported him on a prohibition order in 1920. Manilal visited New Zealand, and in a public lecture discussed the struggles of the working class. He suggested that the public read a book entitled *Red Europe*, written by an Austrian member of parliament. The Ceylonese police were well aware of these events and were concerned about the visit of the Prince of Wales to Ceylon in 1921; they suspected that Manilal would be a source of danger.

Manilal associated with Tamil nationalists and radicals who published the newspapers *Thesa Nesan* and *The Citizen*. The Ceylon government issued a deportation order on him, and there were protests and public meetings opposing the order. Manilal's supporters included moderates of the Ceylon National Congress and radicals such as A.E. Goonesinha of the Young Lanka League and C.H.Z. Fernando. Fernando was a member of the Colombo Municipal Council, where he was successful in passing a resolution denouncing the deportation order. Certain sections of the press joined in the protests, most noteworthy of which were the *Ceylon Daily News* and the *Leader*.

On his return to India, Manilal closely associated with the Communist Party of India and trade union movements. In 1924 he helped S.A. Dange, a prominent Marxist, and other communists in the Kanpur Conspiracy Case.² By 1925 the Ceylon police had obtained information that Aiyar had close contact with Manilal in India and with labour leaders from Australia, America and the Federated Malay Straits, and with political agitators in India.

From 1925 onwards Aiyar was in the forefront of organizing and mobilizing estate workers to win their rights. During the colonial era outsiders were not permitted to enter the estates. Aiyar gained entrance by pretending to be a cloth merchant who with another such merchant from Colombo wanted to sell to the workers. He wrote a pamphlet, "Planter

Raj," in which he severely criticized the living conditions of the estate workers and was critical of the planting community.³

From 1926 to 1931, as the Indian member of the Legislative Council, he served the plantation workers and agitated for their legitimate rights, inclusive of the minimum wage issue. Aiyar worked in the political and trade union movement, along with A.E. Goonesinha, from 1926 to 1928. The two edited a newspaper, *Forward*, which projected the liberation of the oppressed people and freedom for the colonies from the yoke of imperialism. During the harbour strike in 1927, led by Goonesinha, Aiyar was instrumental in mobilizing the workers who came from India to join the strike. He raised the issue of the strike in the Legislative Council, and raised funds for the strike from merchants in Colombo.

Aiyar was an active member of the Ceylon Labour Union of Goonesinha, and he functioned as its vice president. However, it was unfortunate that Goonesinha did not extend his trade union activities to the plantation districts. The reasons for this attitude were that the Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamil members of the middle class refused to recognize the plantation workers as an integral part of the working population. In addition, urban trade union leaders, even though they agreed that the plantation workers lived under semislavery conditions, felt that urban workers had their own battles to fight to keep themselves above the plantation workers' 'low' status. During the first two decades of the 20th century, Ponnambalam Arunachalam was able to speak out for plantation labour, and he received support from his middle-class colleagues of the Social Service League. However, by 1920 Ceylonese politicians did not want to extend the franchise to plantation workers, despite the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission. They argued that granting such franchise rights would be prejudicial to the majority community. This was the official view of the Ceylon National Congress. At this stage Goonesinha did not object to the franchise being extended to plantation workers, but he never showed enthusiasm for it.

The All Ceylon Estate Labour Federation

From the early 1930s Ceylon experienced the global depression, and it became necessary to form a separate trade union to demand the just rights of the plantation workers; there could be no link with their counterparts in the urban sector, since anti-Indian feelings were becoming more evident. This anti-Indian thinking was linked to the Ceylonese view that employment opportunities were being lost to Indians in the country.

In 1931 Aiyar formed the All Ceylon Labour Federation, with its head office in Hatton. He fearlessly fought the most powerful employers, and the workers considered him as their liberator. Apart from trade unionism, social reformation was also on the agenda of the newly formed trade union. Union objectives included the propagation of ideas of brotherhood, self-help, thrift and abstinence from alcohol, gambling and indebtedness. To combat indebtedness the union encouraged the formation of credit societies and cooperative stores. Other objectives were the improvement of education and raising the community's economic and political status. The trade union undertook the repatriation of the weak and the old. It also entered discussions on disputes between workers and employers.

The depression era was unsuitable for trade union activity. Further, due to the trespass laws, trade unionists could not enter estates to meet members. In such circumstances union activities were restricted to redress by way of petitions, and propaganda by way of publications and mass meetings. The filing of petitions was the most popular means of expressing grievances. The number of petitions submitted in 1929 was 956, rising to 1,859 in 1931, and to 2,468 in 1933. This rise was due to union activity.⁴

The chief means of contact between the trade unionist and workers was in meetings held in nearby bazaars. In May 1931 a meeting of 5,000 workers was held in Hatton, and resolutions were passed protesting against the reduction of wages, breaches of the Minimum Wage Ordinance, and the 'tundu' system.⁵ In June 1931 the Kandy branch of the union held a mass meeting in which Aiyar advised the

workers to make representations to employers through the union. In addition, he advised against indebtedness and consuming alcohol. He published several pamphlets in Tamil, including "Rights and Responsibilities of Indian Immigrants," in which he advised workers on the methods of giving 'notice' to employers. In 1931 he commenced the publication of an English journal, the *Indian Estate Laborer*, with V.P. Nathan as editor.⁶

Planters began to be agitated about trade union activity on the estates and sought to crush it. The Planters Association requested the planters to refrain from replying to letters received from the union, and requested the controller of labour to forward petitions he received to the planter concerned.⁷ Certain magistrates who received petitions from plantation workers referred them directly to the superintendent concerned, and Aiyar condemned such practice.

In 1931, after the inaugural meeting of the All Ceylon Estate Labour Federation which was held in the Kandy Municipal Council grounds, future meetings were not permitted. One council member objected to such meetings, as workers were encouraged to indulge in acts of mischief and insubordination.⁸ This tactic was followed in other plantation districts, where vacant land and land belonging to local authorities was not allocated to hold union meetings. The best method to destroy trade unionism on estates was to make use of the *kanganies* and the subordinate staff. Aiyar described the *kanganies* as the real enemies of the workers. In the same year the Planters Association discussed ways to curb Aiyar's activities.⁹

Subsequently and during the same year, the planters printed anti-Aiyar pamphlets and distributed them among workers. They financed a weekly Tamil paper, *Oolian*, which mainly printed anti-Aiyar thinking. The publishers wrote that trade unions were harmful, and that trade unionists only collected money from workers by deceiving them; Aiyar did nothing other than write a few petitions.¹⁰

The planters point of view was expressed by the Estate Staff's Association, which represented minor staff. At a meeting of this association in August 1931, a resolution was adopted to the effect that

members should not have any dealings with Aiyar, and it was emphasized that they must be loyal to the superintendents. The president of this union alleged that "a once contented labour force was now seething with discontent." He further added that he knew of no respectable person who was a member of the union.¹¹

Decline of the Trade Union Movement

The trade union movement to which Natesa Aiyar gave his life gradually declined. The main reason for this is the tactics used by the superintendents, Planters Association and their hirelings, the *kanganies*, all totally averse to the trade union movement. Another factor was the 1930s depression, during which many plantation workers left the island. In addition, urban trade union leaders such as A.E. Goonesinha were not keen on organizing the plantation workers in joint struggles. There was also dissention within Aiyar's own trade union. V.P. Nathan, president of the Kandy branch of the All Ceylon Estate Labour Foundation, broke ranks with Aiyar. He then informed the minister of labour that he disagreed with Aiyar, and that the two had parted ways.

Commencement of Trade Union Activity in the Plantations during Colonial Rule

In 1931 Dr. S.A. Wickremasinghe, who represented the Morawaka constituency in the first State Council, questioned the authorities about the plight of plantation workers. He deplored their living conditions and the oppression they suffered, and he waged a struggle for workmen's compensation and maternity benefits.

The Ordinance for the Registration and Control of Trade Unions was introduced in the State Council during the same year. Under the ordinance all trade unions would have to be registered, and strikes by unregistered trade unions would be illegal. Wickremasinghe strongly protested against the bill being introduced, since the independent functioning of trade unions would be affected. However, this bill was subsequently approved as the Trade Union Ordinance No. 14 of 1935.

The Employers Federation of Ceylon was the first organization to register itself. At the end of 1937 the All Ceylon Head Kanganies Association was registered, with 648 members. The All Ceylon Estate Labour Federation under the leadership of Natesa Aiyar was registered on 19 January 1940. In June the All Ceylon Plantation Workers Union of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party was registered.¹²

The Kanakapulles Trade Union was formed and registered in 1948, with Nawalapitiya as its headquarters; it had 16 branch offices. Its first president was R.S. Velu, with vice president M. Suppiah. Its first conference was held in 1957 at Sri Pada College, Hatton.¹³

The Suriya Mal movement was founded in 1931 by the Ceylonese Ex-Servicemen's Association. In 1933 its leadership passed into the hands of leftists, and the organization adopted an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and anti-war orientation. The movement was the precursor of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which was founded in 1935 by socialists, communists and other progressives who believed in scientific socialism.

The LSSP formed a separate trade union for plantation workers. The All Ceylon Plantation Workers Union had 8,000 members in 1939. It demanded the immediate raising of the minimum wage by 33%, the abolition of the discharge certificate system, pence money and coupon system, and the creation of schemes for pensions and unemployment insurance.¹⁴

In the elections to the State Council in 1936 several left candidates contested, but only N.M. Perera and Philip Gunawardena were successful. Perera, who was elected to represent the Ruwanwella electorate, stated in his speech to the State Council:

Not a single planter supported me ... I was not allowed to visit estates. Definite instructions were sent out that the estate labour vote must strictly support my opponent. I am not complaining one bit. It was my business to canvass Indian votes and get what I could and it was the business of my opponents to get what they could.¹⁵

After recovery from the 1930s depression, the price of tea increased from 42 to 76 cents, and the price of rubber from 12 to 49 cents. The

unemployment problem gradually improved. The government of Madras imposed restrictions on emigration in 1938, and the government of India imposed a ban in 1939.¹⁶ Workers now showed enthusiasm for joining trade unions, and membership increased. There was agitation for better wages and living standards.

The planters were very concerned about these new trends among the workers, and in 1940 they submitted a memorandum to Secretary of State Lord Lloyd, which read as follows¹⁷:

The committee appointed by a meeting of comrades of the great war and their supporters in Kandy, Ceylon, on 4th June 1940, beg to state the following facts and make the following submissions and requests:

1. The complete loosening of the regions of Government by the laissez-faire attitude of those in authority in the Government in the past three years has allowed the Communist Party of Ceylon to stir up strife and disaffection among His Majesty's contented subjects until the labour unrest which commenced in April 1939 has since the commencement of hostilities reached a critical and alarming stage.
2. The following are only a few of the instances of the labour trouble which has been stirred up among the contented labourers since the war started.
 - a. January 10th – a major riot on Mooloya Estate when the police were called in and after having their car damaged had to fire and kill one man in self-defence.
 - b. April – Seven hundred excited and rioting labourers armed with clubs and sticks on Ramboda Estate. The Superintendent was stoned, and hit with a stone.
 - c. April – On Velioya Group the labourers rioted and injured an estate conductor.
 - d. May – Strike occurred in two lots of labourers on Naseby Estate. Five of the injured were admitted into hospital.
 - e. May – There were serious troubles on Needwood Estate and the police were attacked, one being seriously injured and others were less seriously injured.

f. May – In a riot at Wewelhena Estate a large number were injured, as many as 40 being removed to hospital.

g. May – The Kangany of Uda Radella Estate was injured and removed to hospital.

h. May – The police were assaulted by armed labourers on Wewesse Estate and the Superintendant was asked to leave the estate and the police would not be responsible for his safety or that of his wife.

i. May – The Superintendant of St. Andrews Estate was assaulted by labourers and both his arms were injured, one arm being fractured.

How the trouble is increasing will be seen from the above instances, and it needs no imagination to see that a far more serious state of affairs is likely to occur in the near future if strong action is not taken immediately by the Government.

I am My Lord,

Your obedient servant,

(Sgd.) ...

Chairman.

Colombo.

8th June 1940

Several instances of labour unrest occurred on the plantations. The controller of labour in a reported stated as follows: "a slight change in the mode of issue of rice, high handed action on the part of subordinate staff, refusal to recognize an association were sufficient to spark off a strike."¹⁸

As the situation was of growing concern, the minister of labour, industry and commerce discussed the matter with the trade unions, and on 15 July 1940 a Collective Agreement was entered into by: the Planters Association of Ceylon, Ceylon Estates Proprietary Association, Ceylon Association in London, Ceylon India Congress Labour Union, Ceylon Indian Workers Federation and All Ceylon Estate Workers Union. Natesa Aiyar, G.R. Motha and Vernon Gunasekera signed the Collective Agreement on behalf of the trade unions.¹⁹ The Collective Agreement remained only on paper, and there were frequent violations by employers.

Endnotes

¹ Kumari Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 337.

² The Indian police, who were watching Manilal during the proceedings of the Kanpur Conspiracy Case, observed as follows: "Manilal is a well-known Labour agitator who was successfully externed from Fiji, New Zealand and Ceylon and refused permission to practice in the High courts of Madras and Bombay ... He is clever enough to keep in the background but there is ample evidence that he is deeply implicated in the propaganda carried on more openly by others. Manilal helped Singaravelu Chettiar in forming the "legal" Communist party ... the Labour and Kishan party of Hindustan." Indian Government Archives, Home Political, Secret File No. 261 of 1924, cited in Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 340.

³ Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 340-41.

⁴ Report of the Agent of the Government of India, 1933, in Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 344.

⁵ Report of meeting of 3 May 1931, File W3 part v. Minimum Wages, in Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 344.

⁶ Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 344.

⁷ When planters asked the Indian agent K.P.S. Menon to ignore all petitions from the union, he refused, saying that it would be "difficult entirely to ignore petitions signed or thumb marked by labourers, no matter from which source they come from." Letter of 2 June 1933 from secretary, Planters Association, to the controller of labour, and Letter of 5 June 1933 from K.P.S. Menon to the Planters Association, in Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 1972, 345.

⁸ Estate Labour Federation, File 176, quoting *Times of Ceylon*, 17 August 1931, in Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 335.

⁹ Minutes of General Committee of Planters Association, 9 September 1931. Mr. Garvick said his head clerk was the Chairman of the Indian Association working against Natesa Aiyar. He hoped superintendents would provide facilities for members of the Indian Association to hold meetings. Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 346.

¹⁰ *Oolian* was described by the *Times of Ceylon* as "an organ for fostering better understanding between planter and labourers." (Report of meeting of Imboolopitiya Co-operative Society, 29 November 1931) However, this publication was intended to harm Aiyar's trade union activities. It stated that the union was harmful to the plantation worker and attributed labour troubles in the plantations to "the evil machinations of the so-called Estate Labour Federation." It further alleged that the union had done nothing for the workers except take collections from them under various pretexts, and to write petitions "setting out the various grievances alleged by the ignorant labourers." In November 1931 *Oolian* stated that people like Aiyar should be sent to prison, and expressed the hope that it would not be long before some planter decided

to have him "securely shut up for sometime." In December the paper referred to the worker as "an ignorant individual who would give his last penny to hear some maniac get on to a platform and run others down," and said hanging was good a fate for men like Aiyar, "lest they pollute the very rope from whose end they might sway." *Oolian*, 11 September 1930 and 7 November 1931, in Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 346.

¹¹ *Morning Leader*, 28 August 1931, in Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon*, 347.

¹² S. Nadesan, *A History of the Up-Country Tamil People* (Kandy: A. Nandalala Publication, 1993), 108.

¹³ S. Muthiah, *The Indo-Lankans, Their Two Hundred Year Saga* (Colombo: Indian Heritage Foundation, 2003), 85.

¹⁴ Wesley S. Muthiah and Sydney Wanasinghe, eds., *The Bracegirdle Affair* (Colombo: Young Socialist Publications, 2002).

¹⁵ Nadesan.

¹⁶ Nadesan, 109.

¹⁷ Nadesan, 117.

¹⁸ Nadesan, 108.

¹⁹ The Collective Agreement read as follows: "Recognition of the workers rights to unionize and the wish of parties to negotiate with the representatives on any demand. Where no settlement could be arrived at the Department of Labour had the right to intervene and settle disputes by conciliation and arbitration." Nadesan, 117.



Natesa Aiyar



A.E. Goonesinha



C.H.Z. Fernando



Dr. S.A. Wickremasinghe

CHAPTER 5

THE BRACEGIRDLE SAGA

Mark Anthony Bracegirdle was born on 10 September 1912 in Chelsea, London. His father, a political liberal, was an army officer. He was later instrumental in setting up the retail chain of Lyons corner tea shops. Enna Bracegirdle was an active member of the Holborn Labour Party. She was a candidate in 1925 for the London Borough Council. During the 1926 general strike she served on a strike solidarity committee raising funds. In 1928 Enna Bracegirdle left for Australia with her son Mark.

In 1935 Mark joined the Australian Young Communist League and was on the National Students League committee. Having spent about eight years in Australia, in 1935 he set sail for Colombo and arrived on 11 March 1936. He joined Relugas tea estate at Madulkelle near Matale. Bracegirdle said:

Well, mainly the fact that I was going to learn a new type of agriculture. But nothing really political at that time. I had no knowledge of the politics of Ceylon. On the estate we heard of the left movement. The thing that really made me befriend the movement was the bad treatment the workers received on the estate. The superintendent of Relugas estate, H.D. Thompson, drove his workers hard. He would go to the line rooms to force workers to go to work, despite many labourers having malaria or suffering badly from its effects he would insist on them plucking tea. I resented to the superintendent's interventions at the estate school where he forced children to go out and pluck tea. He used to say it is far better that they should learn to pick tea. Learning to read and write was only copying white men and it does them no good at all and will give them ideas in later life about their station.¹

There was trouble on the estate and 50 workers were terminated. Bracegirdle was accused of fraternizing with the workers. His employer booked a return passage for him on a steamer bound for Australia on 24 November 1936, but Bracegirdle did not sail as expected. Subsequently, his proprietor's agent, J.H. Glasse, dismissed him, stating that Bracegirdle was unsuited for planting.²

Bracegirdle then joined the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and was actively involved in trade union activities. On 28 November 1936 he participated in a party meeting at Maradana and was introduced by party leader Colvin R. de Silva: "This is the first time a white comrade has ever attended a party meeting." Addressing the gathering, Bracegirdle said: "I bring greetings from the workers of Australia. The capitalists and imperialists were preparing for war and that in the event of a war it will be the workers who would have to face the war and suffer."³

He took an active role in organizing a protest meeting in Colombo to mark Herbert Dowbiggin's departure from the island. The meeting was organized to protest the atrocities that took place when Dowbiggin was the inspector general of police. There were posters in Colombo informing the public that a meeting would be held on 3 December 1936. Bracegirdle was fined Rs. 1/50 by the Colombo Municipal Council for violating municipal laws.⁴

When Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya visited Ceylon, Bracegirdle accompanied her to meetings in Kandy, Hatton, Nuwara Eliya and Nawalapitiya. As he got on stage at a meeting at Nawalapitiya, there were cheers, handclapping and tumultuous cries of "samy, samy" (god). Addressing the gathering, he said:

Comrade Kamaladevi has pointed out to you how you poor labourers are being mercilessly exploited. (cheers) You see those white hills there – You see those white bungalows (he pointed his fingers in the direction of some estate bungalows) – there the whites live in all luxury. They suck your blood ... They are parasites ... I know the secrets of the planters ... I was also employed in one of the estates ... I came here as I heard it was a rich country, so it is. But all the riches have gone into the pockets of my countrymen – the white men ... They have come here to exploit

the poor labourers and squeeze the life blood out of them ... by distributing rice to the poor labourers they make more profit. The Ordinance requires that their rice should be issued at the purchase price. I know of an estate which made the highest for the year under the rice account ... They enjoy all the comforts. You have no meals. You starve. He pays the rice profit to the club to settle his drink bill. It is enough to keep a hundred families out of starvation. There are many instances where these planters 'play' the money ... On the estate where I was employed I was asked to make an estimate for a job by the P.D., the *Peria Dorai* wanted me to double it. I asked why. He said, 'Oh you don't know what ought to be done.' They gave half name only to the labourers even after he has worked full day. You have to keep quiet because the white man will send you out of the estate. The police will assault you and arrest you. You have to work for nine hours. You need not work a minute after that. If you work the estate must pay you overtime. But you know on every estate, the rule is that you must work for twelve hours. But the planter will not pay you for the extra three hours. There are several illegal acts the planters commit on the estates. Do not be afraid. Don't fear the planters.

A government official who took down Bracegirdle's speech observed:

... the most noteworthy feature of the meeting he claimed unrivalled knowledge of the misdeeds of the planters and promised scandalous exposures. His delivery, facial appearance, his posture were all very threatening ... every sentence was punctuated with cries of samy! samy! from the labourers. Labourers were heard to remark that Mr. Bracegirdle has correctly said that they should not allow planters to break labour laws and they must in future not take things lying down.⁵

Bracegirdle's trade union activities and his vitriolic statements against imperialism created a sensation among the white planters and, therefore, the planting community and the colonial authorities in Colombo wanted to deport him. Governor Edward Stubbs signed the order; if Bracegirdle refused to obey he directed the police to arrest and remove him on board any ship or boat proceeding from any part of the island to Australia. He was given 48 hours to leave by the *SS Moolton*, for which a berth had been booked by the government. But the ship sailed without Bracegirdle.

The police decided to arrest Bracegirdle, but they could not find

him. The task of helping Bracegirdle evade arrest was entrusted to Vernon Gunasekera and Robert Gunawardena.⁶ He was concealed on a coconut estate belonging to Leslie Goonewardene in Katana.⁷ N.M. Perera and Philip Gunawardena moved a vote of censure in the State Council against the governor; it was passed 34 to 7. Among the elected members, there was only one dissident. H.R. Freeman, member for Anuradhapura and a former British civil servant, voted for the resolution.

A meeting was called to protest the deportation order at Galle Face Green. Among the speakers were S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the minister of local government. In his speech he said that he was participating in the meeting irrespective of the fact that he was a minister, and he was prepared to resign or face any consequence. While the meeting was in progress, there was a stillness when it was announced that Bracegirdle would appear on stage. He addressed the gathering. The police came with a warrant for his arrest. Colvin R. de Silva took the warrant and informed the police that it was out of date by several hours. Among the speakers at the meeting were: A.E. Goonesinha, Philip Gunawardena, N.M. Perera, George de Silva, D.M. Rajapakse, Siripala Samarakody, Vernon Gunasekera, Handy Perinpanayagam and Natesa Aiyar.

The police succeeded in arresting Bracegirdle, and a habeas corpus application was filed to challenge the deportation order. The court ruled that Bracegirdle could not be deported for exercising his right of free speech. A special commission was appointed to investigate the circumstances which led to the issuance of the deportation order without consultation with the minister concerned. On 22 November 1938 Philip Gunawardena moved in the State Council to reject the Bracegirdle Commission Report as:

a mischievous political document, whitewashing the permanent officials, and embodying decision against the weight of evidence that are designed to undermine the rightful power, position and prestige of popularly elected representatives and to reinforce the efforts of the white bureaucracy, hostile to the people, to entrench itself in power.

However, the motion was defeated. Only D.P. Jayasooriya, Natesa Aiyar and D.M. Rajapakse voted with N.M. Perera and Philip Gunawardena.⁸ Bracegirdle left Ceylon on 31 October 1937.

Endnotes

¹ Wesley S. Muthiah and Sydney Wanasinghe, eds., *The Bracegirdle Affair* (Colombo: Young Socialist Publications, 2002), 1.

² Muthiah and Wanasinghe, eds., *The Bracegirdle Affair*, 2.

³ Muthiah and Wanasinghe, eds., *The Bracegirdle Affair*, 3.

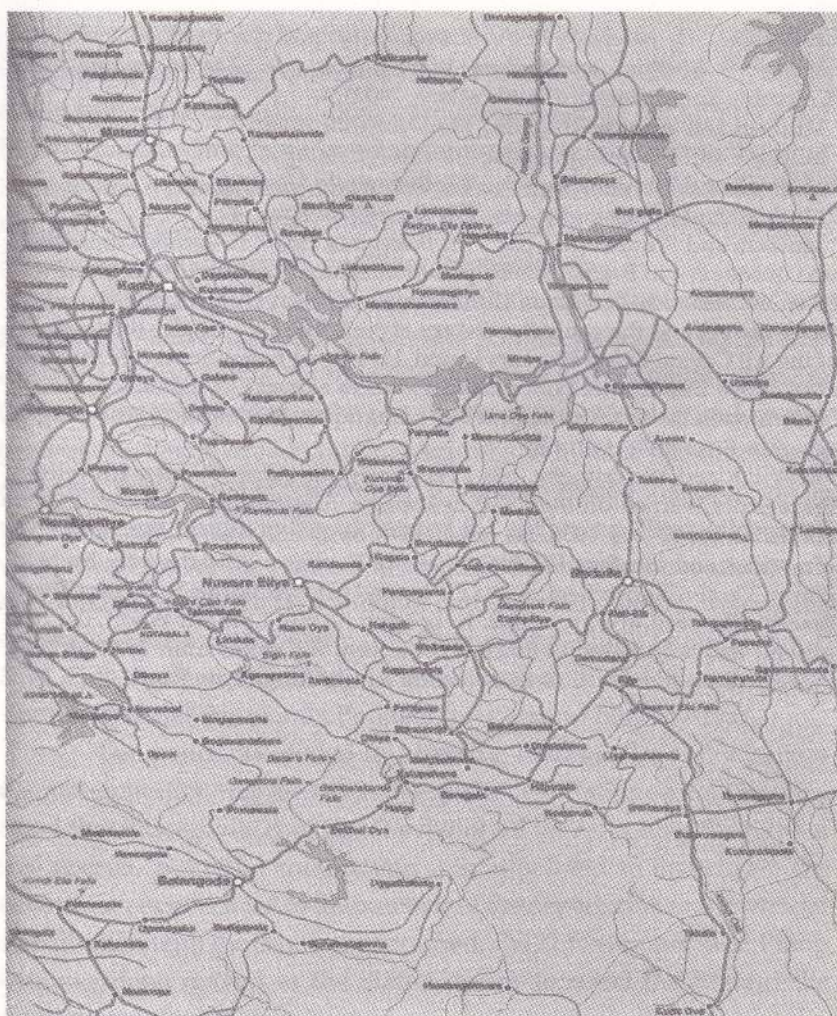
⁴ Muthiah and Wanasinghe, eds., *The Bracegirdle Affair*, 3.

⁵ Muthiah and Wanasinghe, eds., *The Bracegirdle Affair*, 4.

⁶ Muthiah and Wanasinghe, eds., *The Bracegirdle Affair*, 5. Vernon Gunasekera was introduced to Bracegirdle by planter Simpson Hayward. Bracegirdle was taken into custody in Vernon Gunasekera's office at Hultsdorf. Gunasekera was a lawyer and the general secretary of the LSSP. He was also the treasurer of the All Ceylon Estate Workers Union. He played a significant role in events at Mooloya Estate, after police killed a worker named Govindan.

⁷ Information here and in the next two paragraphs, Muthiah and Wanasinghe, eds., *The Bracegirdle Affair*, 5.

⁸ Muthiah and Wanasinghe, eds., *The Bracegirdle Affair*, 7. After his release, Bracegirdle worked on the LSSP newspaper *Samasamajaya*, which was first published on 10 July 1936. He left Ceylon on the SS *Andre Lebon* bound for Marseilles and London. On his departure he was met at the jetty by N.M. Perera, Vernon Gunasekera, Selina Perera and Udakandawala Sarankara Thero. Bracegirdle lived in Hampstead. In London he met Leonard Woolf, the civil servant and well-known author who served in Ceylon from 1904 to 1911. Bracegirdle worked at Collets bookshop on Charring Cross Road.



Tea growing areas



Mark Anthony Bracegirdle



Bracegirdle, N.M. Perera, Vernon Gunasekera, Selina Perera and Udakandawala Sarankara Thero at the jetty before Bracegirdle's departure to England

CHAPTER 6

SIGNIFICANT STRIKES IN THE PLANTATIONS

Kotiyagala Strike

This strike took place in 1939. The workers on Kotiyagala Estate, Bogawantalawa, sought permission from the management to form an association which aimed to prohibit the sale of liquor and to prevent gambling. However, the white superintendant refused to permit this. Since persistent requests went unheeded, in April the workers resorted to strike action to win their demands. The management threatened the workers with dismissal, but the workers did not yield and the strike was successful.

After this strike there were about 18 plantation strikes, as compared to four in other working-class sectors during the same period.¹ Controller of Labour Gimson commented: "the first strike on Kotiyagala estate in Bogawantalawa is a landmark in the history of the Indian labour in this country."² He further stated: "The most important feature of the year is the manifestation of widespread unrest among estate labourers. In the past estate labourers ventilated their feelings by sending petitions."³

There were few signs that the Tamil labourer, who had over the course of more than a century shown himself docile, amenable to discipline and diligent, would react to the forces of labour consciousness.⁴ Inspector General of Police P.N. Banks, in a circular to police, said:

Of late various influences have been at work which has made estate labour politically minded, and consequently, there are many labourers

who feel discontented with their present conditions of life and work. Threats of sit-down strikes have been made. There are instances where the superintendents of estates have given certain agitators notice and had to obtain an order from the court to eject them when they refused to quit. It is necessary, therefore, that the police should know exactly what policy should be followed.⁵

Assistant Superintendent of Police, Central Province, Robins gave the following instructions to the police:

It is essential that all ranks not only know by heart their firing orders but also that they can appreciate the application of these ... It is still more essential now that all ranks do their utmost to collect information of unrest, agitation and impending trouble both on the estates and in villages. I strongly advise the use of reliable plain clothes men with warrant tickets for the purpose in already disturbed areas, example, Hewahetta, Galaha, Nawalapitiya, Agras.⁶

Mooloya Estate Strike

W.E. Sparling was the proprietor planter of this estate situated at Hewahetta, Kandy District, in the Central Province. The All Ceylon Estate Workers Union of the LSSP functioned on this estate, where there were approximately 1,400 workers who were members of the union. They demanded a wage increase and other welfare measures. Estate school teacher Jeganathan was an active member of the union, and he assisted the workers' struggle in many ways. Due to this, management insisted that he vacate his line room. The workers protested and called a strike on 1 January 1940.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Robins took into custody the secretary of the union, P. Velusamy, on the allegation of trespass on the estate. The workers were further provoked, the strike developed, and the estate factory ceased to function. Supporters of the established order sought to suppress the strike. Even the State Council member for Nuwara Eliya, E.W. Gunasekera, was instrumental in granting support to the police to stop the strike. He sent a telegram to ASP Robins, which stated: "At the instance of the Communist Party several hundreds of coolies of Mooloya estate are on strike ... timely action should be taken ... I am willing to render all assistance to you all."⁷

The strike could not be broken. The police were called in, but workers refused to be intimidated. Police Sergeant D.G. Suraweera opened fire, killing a worker, Govindan. This occurred on 10 January 1940 at field number one. The workers printed a leaflet in Sinhala and Tamil explaining their position:

The bold labour strike ... for what? It is for an increase of 16 cents in the wages. The superintendent got alarmed when he saw the Sinhalese and Tamil brothers standing shoulder to shoulder ... and thought of bringing dozens of armed police from Kandy and sending the labourers to work to frighten them. The strikers were not afraid of the police and the guns but stood their grounds ten times more courageously than before. Finding that they have not succeeded in their aim the police have arrested P. Velusamy. The labourers of Mooloya estate – Tamil and Sinhalese – through their striking work exclaim with joy that they will put down the pride of power and acts of injustice and become victorious.⁸

The governor reluctantly appointed a commission to inquire into the murder of Govindan. After four months delay, due to public agitation the report was released. The commissioner held that the shooting of Govindan was unlawful. He did not believe the police, who had concocted evidence to justify the shooting. No steps were taken to punish the wrongdoers, and it was patently clear that the governor took the side of the police. Seven workers were imprisoned allegedly for testifying falsely to the commission of inquiry.

Knarsmire Estate Strike

In 1942 the government tried to acquire 500 acres of land belonging to the Knarsmire estate, Bulathkohupitiya. If successful, estate workers would have been left with no option but to leave the estate and find alternative employment. As a prelude to acquisition, barbed wire was placed around the workers' living quarters, restraining free access. A protest strike was launched and lasted several weeks. Workers of Kelani valley, Kegalle, Avissawella and Yatiyantota struck work in solidarity. After some time workers from Maskeliya, Hatton, Nuwara Eliya and Nawalapitiya joined.

Several workers on Knarsmire Estate were charged for criminal trespass and convicted. This verdict was appealed, but the lower's court's verdict was affirmed. On appeal to the Privy Council, the accused were acquitted.

Devon Estate Strike

Devon Estate at Talawakele was owned by local Tamil proprietors. The workers had several grievances which management did not address, although they were of a day-to-day nature. The workers were members of the LSSP union and resorted to strike action. The management plotted to murder the estate trade union leader (*thalavar*) Vaithilingam. One night when Vaithilingam was at home, two person knocked on the door and told him that the proprietor wanted to see him. Vaithilingam left for the estate bungalow, and on the way he was killed. Estate owners and others were responsible for the murder, but were acquitted on lack of evidence.

Meeriyadde Estate Strike

Meeriyadde, or Caladonia, situated at Upcot, was owned by one time member of parliament for Nuwara Eliya Donald Ranaweera. The *kangany* system prevailed on this estate, and there was severe oppression of workers. They had to engage in trade union activity clandestinely, since the *kangany* and estate management were antipathetic towards trade union activity.

The estate trade union leader, Muthulingam, and the committee could not meet in their living quarters, since they feared the consequences if management found out.⁹ Meetings were held at night in the tea field by the light of a kerosene lamp. They recorded their grievances in a minute book.¹⁰

Muthulingam raised goats, and one of them was seen grazing in the tea field. A watcher alleged that the goat had been let loose deliberately, and management informed Muthulingam that an inquiry would be held to investigate. On the appointed day Muthulingam presented himself for inquiry with the estate committee. Management

disapproved of the presence of the committee and refused to hold the inquiry. The Maskeliya police were summoned to the estate. They arrived at night and forcibly dragged Muthulingam out of his living quarters and brutally assaulted him. Workers who protested were threatened with arrest.

The next day police came to the estate and arrested 24 workers for breach of peace. They were produced in court and released on bail. However, the next day they were fired. Other workers were threatened to disband the trade union, but they did not. In November 1953 they launched a strike, which lasted for 16 days. Management efforts to discredit the strike and coerce the workers were unsuccessful.

As the strike continued, about 40 workers were brought from outside to work on the estate, and the watchers were given arms to provide them security. During a fight between a woman worker and the *kangany* the watchers opened fire, injuring 16 workers, one seriously; he died at the General Hospital in Kandy. Management refused to allow the body to be brought to the estate.

Subsequently, the workers left the estate. The property was neglected, became overgrown with weeds, and was later abandoned.

Dayagama Estate Strike

Dayagama Estate is located at Dayagama in the Nuwara Eliya District. During 1956 a major strike was organized by workers. Management and the Ceylon Estate Employers Federation recognized only the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) for union activity; they refused to recognize the Democratic Workers Congress, which also had members on the estate.¹¹ In protest, workers struck for 48 days.

The assistant commissioner of labour at Hatton held a conference to resolve the dispute. However, management refused to participate. In protest against the actions of management and to show solidarity with the strikers, the entire labour force went out on strike. About 10,000 workers participated in this mass action. Ultimately, workers attached to the CWC decided to resume work, and there were incessant disputes between the strikers and nonstrikers. A youth named Abramsingho, along

with others, requested the nonstrikers to join the strike. There were skirmishes. Police who were guarding the superintendant's bungalow were summoned and opened fire on the unarmed workers. Abramsingho died from gunshot wounds.¹²

Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike conferred with the commissioner and assistant commissioner of labour, and it was decided that all registered trade unions would be recognized by the Estate Employers Federation. After this incident the federation decided to permit use of a minute book if a union had 1/3 of total membership, and to recognize appointed spokesmen. Workers showed preference by use of secret ballot.

Madena Estate Strike

Madena Estate is situated at Galkaduwa in the Matale District. Workers had several grievances that management refused to address, and in 1959 they notified management that trade union action would be taken if the grievances were not considered. They were not, and many workers went out on strike. Other workers continued to work. There was a confrontation between strikers, and nonstrikers and watchers. The latter opened fire, and Kalakara Muthusamy was seriously injured, and soon ^{or} died in Kandy General Hospital. Fifty thousand workers in the district went out on strike. When Muthusamy's body was brought to the estate for burial it was carried in procession from Elkaduwa town to the estate.

Mylittiya Estate Strike

The estate is located in Ratnapura District. A worker named Kutiyapillai formed a union on this estate, and workers went on strike over such issues as failure to pay wages for work completed and refusal to provide basic amenities. The strike lasted for three months. The estate manager appointed a new assistant superintendent, Mr. Gunatilake, who ordered workers not to leave their line rooms or the estate. They were placed under surveillance and denied their usual weekly rations. He brought in people from outside to work. A priest from Ratnapura, Father Jacob, who came to the estate to conduct weekly prayers, intervened with

officials at the kachcheri, and the rations were resumed. On 27 October 1968, as several workers were returning to the estate from town, a fight broke out with a watcher employed at the estate factory. The watcher opened fire and killed a worker named Anthonysamy.

Nalanda Estate Strike

Nalanda Estate in Matale District was privately owned. Workers formed a trade union, and many grievances were redressed. Late at night on 30 December 1970 management brought thugs to the estate; they were armed with poles, knives and swords. Workers had received prior warning, and sent the women and children out into the fields. When the thugs arrived the workers retaliated, and the thugs fled. The next morning when the workers reported for work, they were abused by watchers. One worker, Arumugan, questioned the watchers, who opened fire and injured a woman worker, who later died of her injuries. Two other workers were also injured and later died.¹³ Trade unions in Matale and Hatton held meetings; they acted jointly despite their rivalry.

Keenakelle Strike

During 1970 workers on this estate managed by the Sterling Company in Uva Province went out on a strike that lasted 90 days. A worker had fallen ill and no vehicle was provided to transport him to the hospital; to arrange a vehicle one had to travel about seven miles to the Queenstown Division and obtain permission from the estate medical assistant. Workers went out on strike, and management tried to suppress it. An armed battalion entered the estate, and workers gathered near the estate factory. Police baton charged and opened fire. Two workers were seriously injured and on admission to hospital died; they were Alagarsamy (22) and Ramish (26). At first police refused to allow the bodies to be brought to the estate, but they later relented. Workers and the general public, however, were not permitted to participate in the funeral. The burial took place in the presence of only a few relatives.

In 1970 estate staff members in the Ceylon Estate Staff's Union went out on strike. The estate manager, an Englishman named Summerville, planned to amalgamate Keenakelle with Queenstown

Estate, a move that would have adversely affected workers and staff. The Uva branch of the union protested this plan, and a strike was launched. Manufacturing came to a stop, but then staff and workers formed a committee and ran the establishment for almost a month.¹⁴

Superintendents Agitation

In general, the role of estate superintendant was to work against and break strikes. However, at one point some felt compelled to seek union assistance regarding government action. One day in 1976 the Walapane MP T.B.M. Herath visited the superintendent of Liddesdale Estate, Mr. Thiagarajah, and demanded money from him. Thiagarajah refused, and the MP then filed a complaint with the Walapane police, stating that Thiagarajah's daughter had tried to shoot him with a pistol. That night, the police did not succeed in their attempt to take the daughter into custody.¹⁵

As the 1977 general election approached, the government sought to acquire large tracts of well-grown tea land to give to their political supporters. Workers protested against this. On Devon Estate, Patana, surveyors entered the estate to demarcate such land, and the police officer-in-charge opened fire; a worker named Sivanu Letchuman was killed. A large crowd attended the funeral, including many trade union leaders who addressed the gathering.

The planters protested on the following issues:

- a. harassment of labour on Delta and Sanquar estates,
- b. the illegal alienation of land in Nuwara Eliya and Maskeliya areas, and
- c. the false complaint against Thiagarajah's daughter.¹⁶

Staff received support from the following: CWC, Ceylon Estate Staff's Union, Ceylon Plantation Workers (Red Flag) Union and the National Workers Union. Many came to Colombo to demonstrate at Galle Face Green. However, the demonstration was cancelled when the inspector general of police agreed to discussions. Tribute should be paid to the planting community for their spirit to agitate, but it is the proletariat that successfully resort to strike action.

Endnotes

¹ S. Nadesan, *A History of the Up-Country Tamil People in Sri Lanka* (Kandy: A. Nandalala Publication, 1993), 101.

² Nadesan, 111.

³ There were various methods of agitation, and the most common nonviolent means of protest was the right of petition. In 1908 it was estimated that the government received an average of 4,000 petitions a year. Governor Sir Henry McCallum called the right of petition "a valuable safety valve for the ventilation of grievances." Legislative Council of Ceylon – Minutes of Session 1908-9, 16. A Ceylonese journalist referred to it as "the very Magna Carta of the masses ... and one of the greatest aids to the administration of justice." Argus Zelanicus, *The un-British Administration of Ceylon*. The petition writer played an important role in the towns, villages and plantation areas because of his knowledge of English. He was often the sole means of communication between employers and workers, between government officials and the population, and between the ruling classes and the public. In general, the petition drawer used flattery and bestowed lavish honourific titles. The petition writer was a fearless individual who wrote against anyone, no matter how powerful he was, and on any subject. The *Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union* of October 1908 reported: "When some cause of oppression or injustice has to be brought to the notice of higher powers he is a ready and willing advocate ... instances have been known in which he has risked jail on a charge of contempt." Before the formation of trade unions the petition was the most widely used method for workers to express their demands. For example, the clerks in government service petitioned regularly about their pay and conditions of service. In 1842 a petition seeking an increase in pay and promotion was presented by government clerks. In 1858 Unofficial Members of the Legislative Council presented similar petitions on behalf of the clerks. In 1885 a petition containing the grievances of clerks in the General Post Office was present in the Legislative Council by P. Ramanathan. The colonial secretary condemned this as "a grave breach of discipline." P. Ramanathan: *A Brief Sketch of a Brilliant Career*. Even relatively less secure workers would send individual petitions to their employers. Trade union officials also used the petition as a means of expressing union demands to employers, especially before the recognition of trade unions. Kumari Jayawardena, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 28-29.

⁴ Nadesan, 110.

⁵ Nadesan, 111.

⁶ Nadesan, 111.

⁷ Nadesan, 112.

⁸ Nadesan, 111. Govindan was survived by his ageing mother, wife and two small children, one of whom was lame.

⁹ Many local proprietors were reluctant to encourage trade union activity on their estates. It should be noted that in 1956 on Nallatahni Estate, Maskeliya, the owner himself formed a trade union and appointed officers as new

strategy to combat workers agitating for their rights. All workers were forced to join this trade union. Several workers dissented, and a new union was formed under the leadership of a young worker, Karumalai, the son of Periyasamy and Valliamah. On the instigation of management, some workers threw stones at the line rooms of workers in the new union. The next day, on a complaint made by estate authorities, 40 workers were taken into custody by the Maskeliya police. However, Karumalai was not arrested, enraging the estate authorities. They encouraged watchers to harm Karumalai. A discussion was arranged between Karumalai and the watchers, at which both factions of workers were present. There was a fight, and a woman worker cut the hand of a male worker. The police were summoned and the woman was arrested; subsequently, she was released on bail. The management was infuriated over this incident, and it is alleged that on their instigation the watchers and others murdered Karumalai.

¹⁰ The minute book is maintained by the *thalavar* and estate committee; worker grievances are recorded and submitted to estate authorities.

¹¹ The issue of recognition of trade unions having less than 1/3 of an organization's membership arose again when the United National Party was in power, with Ranjan Wijeratne as the minister of plantation industries. The Ceylon Estate Employers Federation decided to recognize only unions which had at least 1/3 membership, thus depriving the right of check-off to the smaller trade unions. A fundamental rights application was instituted, and the federation's decision was overturned.

¹² Abramsingho was 28 at the time of his death. There were six in his family. His parents were Alwis Appuhamy and Mudiyanalage Ukku Menike.

During the next year, two workers in Uda Pussellawa area were shot by police. In July 1957 a trade union office was opened by a CWC stalwart, Vijayasunderam, at Uda Pussellawa bazaar, situated in the Walapane electorate of Nuwara Eliya District. Certain persons questioned the right of plantation workers to open the office. Some lumpen elements and thugs in the area looted the office and set it on fire, destroying it. They also looted the shop belonging to Sithambaram (head *kangany* on Rapanok Estate, Uda Pussellawa) and burnt it. Workers in neighbouring estates struck work and came to the bazaar to demonstrate. The police opened fire, killing two workers, Kompadia (57) and Ponniah (37), both of Alnick Estate.

¹³ The woman who was killed was Pawathy, age 18. The other two workers were Kandiah and a boy, Ramasamy.

¹⁴ The Uva regional representative of the Ceylon Estate Staff's Union was Marshal Perera, a lawyer who had started his political career in the LSSP. However, in 1963, when the LSSP joined the coalition government led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Perera disagreed with this practice of coalition politics and broke with the LSSP. Among others who did the same were Bala Tampoe and Edmund Samarakkody. After this, Perera was actively involved in the trade union movement, mainly in Uva Province. He got involved in the Keenakelle staff strike. At that time the general secretary of the Ceylon Estate

CHAPTER 7

ELECTORAL REFORMS AND PLANTATION WORKERS

The Ceylonese bourgeoisie was not in favour of granting the franchise to everyone. Franchise was at first restricted to the property-owning classes, and was later extended on the basis of literacy. As such, it was confined to only a tiny segment of the English-educated elite. When reforms were proposed in 1910 the Buddhist press deplored the injustice of excluding education and literacy in Sinhala.¹ However, trade union leaders, such as A.E. Goonesinha, supported voting rights for everyone, irrespective of income and literacy, since income was used as a way to deny people the right to vote. The British were reluctant to extend the franchise, since they favoured the privileged classes.

Women were totally discriminated against and were denied the franchise. It was the trade union movement under A.E. Goonesinha that strongly opposed the grant of franchise on the basis of gender. It was assumed that women had to confine themselves to domestic affairs, their homes and children. Feminist activists who desired a complete radicalization of society included: Doreen Winifred Wickremasinghe, Vivienne Goonewardene, Selina Perera, Daisy Maria Florence Senanayake, Kusuma Gunawardena, Edith Gymroi Ludowyk, Catherine Perera, Ponsinahamy, Kamaladevi, Meenachchi, Natesa Aiyar, Jean Moonesinghe, Theja Gunawardena, Kusula Abhayavardhana, Nirmal Balaratnam, Subbiah Kokilam, Mary Rutnam, Maud Keuneman and Sarojini Ramanujam.

The bourgeoisie were reluctant to grant franchise rights to plantation workers. K.M. de Silva writes:

Another point gave the leaders of the Ceylon National Congress cause for concern, namely the extension of the franchise to the immigrant Indian plantation workers on almost the same terms as for the indigenous population. Sinhalese politicians feared that this would lead to a potentially harmful increase in the political influence of the European planters, the employers of Indian labour. But these fears were nothing compared to the alarm they felt over the prospect of political threat to the interests of the Sinhalese population in the plantation districts. The Indians were present in some districts in such large numbers that the Sinhalese, especially the Kandyans, were thoroughly disturbed at the possibility of an Indian domination of the central highlands of the island if permanent citizenship rights were conferred on the Indian population there without adequate safeguards for the interests of the indigenous population. The opposition to the unrestricted extension of the franchise to the Indians in Sri Lanka became one of the major political issues in the country in the aftermath of the Donoughmore Report, an issue on which there was an identity of interests between the Congress leadership and the Kandyan leaders.²

When village committees were introduced in 1937, the plantation workers were not allowed to exercise the franchise.³ S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who was the minister of local government in the Board of Ministers of the State Council, brought an amendment to the ordinance by which provision was made to impose an acreage tax on estates that were situated within the village areas and their periphery. Thereafter, the franchise was extended to Europeans and Burghers, but not to plantation workers. N.M. Perera commented that:

They have no objection to enfranchising European planters ... Those who have property who exploit the people in the true sense of the word are enfranchised. But when it comes to the poor labourer who has not the fortune to possess land, he is not enfranchised ... this bogey of swamping is entirely imaginary and has been created by a handful of people ... the interest of the Indian labourers and the vast mass of peasants and workers in this country are the same. The fight is against the capitalist class whether they are Indians or Ceylonese.⁴

In 1931 the people of Indian origin elected two persons to the State Council. Two were also elected in 1936, one of whom became a minister (Peri Sunderam). In 1940 Governor Sir Andrew Caldecot

attempted to restrict the franchise rights of Indian Tamils.⁵ The administration gave strict instructions to the authorities concerned to interview each person of Indian Tamil origin prior to registering his name in the electoral register. The Soulbury Commission Report revealed that the number of Indian Tamil voters decreased from 225,000 to 168,000 in 1943, while the general electorate increased from 150,000 in 1931 to 2,635,000 in 1940.⁶ Natesa Aiyar stated that in the Hatton electorate the total population was 138,000, of which 113,493 were Indian Tamils; only 48,744 were registered as voters.⁷

It is worth noting that Colonel T.W. Wright, a planter and member of the Legislative Council, wrote:

Under the new Constitution it was made most difficult for the estate labourers to get a vote in the elections. It must be remembered that very many of these Indian labourers were born in Ceylon, and had never been to India. I myself applied to the Government Agent as many Tamil coolies on the estate of which I was in charge wish to become Ceylonese. I sent in a list and was requested to postpone the applications for a few months as the Government Agent was extremely busy. Eventually I got a notice to say that all these coolies should go to the police station which there and back was ten miles away and they will be interrogated. To any one knowing the Tamil coolie, a police station would be the very last place they would visit ... I wrote and told the Government Agent that I did not think that they would go, and that they might have trusted one who had been in the State Council and Justice of the Peace for the island to interrogate them instead of a policeman. This controversy had led to an antagonistic feeling between Ceylon and Indian Governments.⁸

It is a well-known axiom that in a feudal or capitalist society chauvinism and discrimination are rampant. In the bygone society the monarchy exercised absolute power over its citizens and discriminated against them on social issues. Vestiges of this were carried over to the capitalist society. The ruling classes were keen to deprive the plantation workers of the right to the franchise due to their belonging in the working class.

The 1940 electoral register was revised. The legal secretary, in his report on the revision of electoral registers for 1940, observed that

there were twelve districts in which decreases of over 1,000 had occurred, with such districts aggregating 29,562. Of these twelve districts, eight had a large number of Indian voters, and the decrease totalled 24,138. The following table shows the breakdown.⁹

Electoral District	Decrease
Colombo Central	14,008
Dumbara	1,286
Gampola	1,812
Hatton	5,158
Talawakele	3,338
Nuwara Eliya	2,299
Bandarawela	2,928
Badulla	3,309

In the general election held in September 1947 under the Soulbury Constitution, the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC) won six seats in the plantation districts. Two Tamil independent candidates won two seats, with support of the CIC. The six CIC members were: K. Rajalingam (Nawalapitiya), G.R. Motha (Maskeliya), C.V. Velupillai (Talawakele), S. Thondaman (Nuwara Eliya), S.M. Subbiah (Badulla) and K. Kumaravel (Kotagala). The two independents were: K.V. Nadaraja (Bandarawela) and D. Ramanujam (Aluthnuwara). In 1950, on the death of G.R. Motha, a by-election was held and A. Aziz was elected.¹⁰

Endnotes

¹ K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2005), 473.

² K.M. de Silva, 473.

³ Village Committee Ordinance No. 13 of 1937.

⁴ S. Nadesan, *A History of the Up-Country Tamil People in Sri Lanka* (Kandy: A. Nandalala Publication, 1993).

⁵ K. Velayutham, "A Ride," *Thinakural*, 16 January 2008.

⁶ *Soulbury Commission Report*, 54.

⁷ Natesa Aiyar, *Indo-Lanka Crisis*, 107.

⁸ T.W. Wright, *Ceylon in My Time*.

⁹ "Revision of Electoral Register (1940), Report by Legal Secretary," (S.P. 11 of 1940), 3-4.

¹⁰ A. Aziz won over Mr. Rajapreyar, a family friend of Thondaman, who was instrumental in influencing the latter to enter politics. "Mr. Rajapreyar told him [Thondaman], Young man, take it ... some of us fight to get such positions ... we go after such jobs ... you are being offered it on a plate. Take it." T. Sabaratnam, *Out of Bondage*, 16.



Perisundaram
1931 -1936



S.P. Vaithilingam
1931 -1947



I. X. Pereira
1931 -1947



Natesa Iyer
1931 -1947

Indian-origin representatives elected to the State Council



S. Thondaman



K. Rajalingam



G.R. Mottha



Abdul Aziz



C.V. Velupillai



K. Kumaravel



S.M. Suppiah



D.Ramanujam

Elected Members of Parliament, 1947

CHAPTER 8

CITIZENSHIP AND INDIA

Citizenship Acts

In 1945 D.S. Senanayake held discussions with the British government, and it was agreed that the question of citizenship would be left in the hands of the government of independent Ceylon. In 1948 Prime Minister Senanayake and his ruling United National Party (UNP) decided to determine citizenship on the principle of descent, not birth. This principle was reactionary, with tones of South Africa's policy on apartheid and the Nazi's on the Jews. The UNP was concerned about the influence held by people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka. It did not want to send this population back to India, but rather to reduce their power in Sri Lanka, especially any influence on the composition of government.

Minister of Finance J.R. Jayewardene stated in the debate on the franchise bill that in the Central Province the Kandyan population of 480,000 was only a little larger than the Indian population of 431,000. In the Sabaragamuwa Province, he pointed to 72,000 Indians and 220,000 Kandyans, and in the Uva Province to 235,000 Indians and 355,000 Kandyans.

For the effective management and operation of, and profit from, the plantations, the capitalist class did not wish to disturb the equilibrium in the plantations; therefore, it did not want to send the workers back to India. A big concern was that plantation workers had supported left candidates, strengthening the left, with implications for future elections. Sir Ivor Jennings said: "Speaking generally however, the election was not fought on communal lines. The Indians voted solidly

for the candidates of the Ceylon Indian Congress, and where there was no such candidates in areas where the Indian vote was strong as in Sabaragamuwa, they generally supported left-wing candidates."¹

The concern of the UNP government was heightened by the results of a 1948 by-election in Kandy. T.B. Ilangaratne, presenting the broad left and progressive forces, was pitted against Fred E. de Silva. Plantation workers voted for Ilangaratne, and he won. However, he was later unseated on an election petition; in a later election Tamara Ilangaratne won.²

In 1947 Prime Minister Nehru of India and D.S. Senanayake discussed the question of citizenship, but no finality was reached. Sri Lanka became an independent country in February 1948, and in August parliament passed the Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948. In 1949 the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment Act) deprived the majority of plantation workers of voting rights, based on their not being citizens. Under the Citizenship Act, Sinhalese, Ceylon Tamils, Muslims, Malays and Burghers became citizens by descent, if it could be proved (by the appointed date of 15 November 1948) that a person's father, or his paternal grandfather and great-grandfather, had been born in Ceylon. Section 4 of the Citizenship Acts reads as follows:

4(1) Subject to the other provisions of this part, a person born in Ceylon before the appointed date shall have the status of a citizen of Ceylon by descent, if

a. his father was born in Ceylon, or
b. his paternal grandfather and paternal great-grandfather were born in Ceylon.

(2) Subject to the other provisions of this part a person born outside Sri Lanka before the appointed date shall have the status of a citizen of Ceylon by descent, if

a. his father and paternal grandfather were born in Ceylon, or
b. his paternal grandfather and paternal great-grandfather were born in Ceylon.

Part I of the Act speaks of status and nationality, Part II of citizenship by descent, Part III of citizenship by registration, and Part IV of the loss of citizenship. The Act compels a person to renounce citizenship rights of another country. Section 20 reads as follows:

(1) Where a person born before the appointed date is a citizen of Ceylon by descent and is also on that date a citizen of any other country, that person shall,

a. on the 31st day of December 1952, or

b. on the day on which he attains the age of twenty-two years whichever day is in his case the latter, cease to be a citizen of Ceylon, unless before that day he renounces citizenship of that other country in accordance with the law therein in force in that behalf and notifies such renunciation to a prescribed officer.

(2) Where a person is a citizen of Ceylon by descent and that person by operation of law, is at the time of his birth or becomes thereafter, also a citizen of any other country, that person shall

a. on the 31st of December 1952, or

b. on the day immediately succeeding the date of the expiration of a period of twelve months from the date on which he so becomes a citizen of that other country, or

c. on the day on which he attains the age of twenty-two years whichever day is in his case the latest, cease to be a citizen of Sri Lanka unless before that date he renounces citizenship of that other country in accordance with the law therein in force in that behalf and notifies such renunciation to a prescribed officer.

(3) A person who under subsection (2) of Section 5, is a citizen of Ceylon by descent but whose father is or was a citizen of Ceylon by registration, shall, on the day on which he attains the age of twenty-two years cease to be a citizen of Ceylon, unless before that date he transmits to the Minister in the prescribed manner and form a declaration of retention of citizenship of Ceylon.

(4) In the case of any person to whom the provisions of any of the preceding subsections apply, the Minister may in his discretion direct

that those provisions shall apply in that case subject to the modification that the reference therein to the age of twenty-two years shall be construed as a reference to such higher age as may be specified in the direction.

(5) A person who is a citizen of Ceylon by descent shall cease to be a citizen of Ceylon if he voluntarily becomes a citizen of any other country.

(6) Where a person who having been exempt from the requirements of paragraph a. of subsection (1) of Section 8 resumes the status of a citizen of Ceylon by descent by virtue of a declaration under that subsection, that person shall on the day immediately succeeding the date of expiration of a period of three months (or such longer period as the Minister may for good cause allow) from the date of the declaration cease to be a citizen of Ceylon unless he earlier complies with the requirement of the aforesaid paragraph a.

This section shows how complicated and difficult it was for the plantation worker to obtain citizenship if he had been born in India. This section is against dual citizenship, and one has to prove the negative, and in the event of another country bestowing citizenship then, too, one has to renounce it.

There was tremendous opposition to the Citizenship Act by left leaders. They voiced their opposition inside and outside parliament. However, G.G. Ponnambalam, who once fought for 50-50 legislative representation for Tamils and Sinhalese, supported this Act in parliament due to class interests. Tamil leaders such as C. Suntheralingam and S.J.V. Chelvanayagam opposed it. Pieter Keuneman had this to say in parliament:

No
the production of birth certificates is not an easy matter ... there are no birth certificates available to the poorer people. Many of them do not bother to keep certificates, and in the case of older persons there are not certificates available because it was only in the early part of the 20th century that the registration of births became compulsory. Luckily nobody has asked me to prove that I am a citizen of Ceylon, but I certainly could not do that by producing my father's birth certificate because my late father was born before registration of births took place.
• I do not know whether the Honourable Dudley Senanayake would ever be able to prove that he is a citizen of Ceylon according to the formal requirements under the law.

N.M. Perera said: "In no country in the world are they so restrictive with regard to citizenship. People whose forefathers laid down their lives and whose bones lie buried here, apparently for the prosperity of the capitalist elements in this country. All those people will be excluded. Is it just and fair?"

Subsequently, parliament passed the Immigrants and Emigrants Act No. 20 of 1948, which made provisions for controlling the entry into Ceylon of persons other than citizens, for regulating the departure from Ceylon of citizens and persons other than citizens, for removing from Ceylon undesirable persons who are not citizens of Ceylon, and for other matters incidental to or connected with such matters.

After this, the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act No. 3 of 1949 was passed. This Act enabled the granting of citizenship to people of Indian and Pakistani origin. Any person who desired to acquire citizenship had to prove that one had uninterrupted residence in Ceylon for a maximum period of seven years if married, and ten years if unmarried. The government appointed commissioners to hold inquiries on persons who wanted to acquire citizenship. These commissioners held inquiries in various cities and the plantation districts, and sometimes on the estates. However, it was difficult for people to answer the queries raised by the commissioners. An appeal against the order of the commissioners had to be made to the Supreme Court.

The first general election after the passage of these acts was held in 1952. Since the majority of plantation workers were excluded from the electoral register, a satyagraha was organized, under the leadership of S. Thondaman, A. Aziz and K. Rajalingam. The aim was to focus public attention on the need for securing (a) a citizenship law that was reasonable and fair, (b) the immediate restoration of the franchise to those deprived of it, to enable them to participate in the next election, and (c) to reach an amicable settlement of this longstanding problem.³

On 28 April 1952 the CIC leaders marched to the prime minister's office. The police ordered them to disperse and forcibly removed them. They returned and sought an interview with secretary to the prime minister Sir Kanthiah Vaithianathan. They sat on the verandah opposite the prime minister's office, while the other satyagrahis sat opposite the Senate

building. The satyagrahis were again removed by the police. They returned the next day, with Thondaman and Aziz sitting at the prime minister's office and Rajalingam on the steps leading to parliament. This went on for several days. On 2 June, the first sitting of the new parliament, the satyagrahis returned and were assaulted by police and physically thrown out. Dr. Dahanayake was the only MP who helped the satyagrahis, providing them with water.⁴ In all, some 6,000 satyagrahis participated in the campaign, some also undertaking a fast. While the satyagraha was in progress former State Council member S.P. Vaithilingam was designated an appointed MP, a move characterized "to keep a facade of representation for Ceylon Indians in Parliament."⁵ The campaign was suspended when the prime minister stated that the Department of Registration of Persons of Indian Origin would expedite citizenship applications.

Dudley Senanayake-Nehru Pact

Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake and Indian High Commissioner C.C. Desai held a series of discussions on citizenship to Indians in Ceylon. In June 1953 the prime ministers of the two countries held several rounds of talks. These centred on matters raised by Senanayake:

- a. Of an estimated 950,000 Ceylon Indians in 1953, 400,000 were to be registered as Ceylon citizens under the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act.
- b. A maximum of 250,000 would be granted permanent residence permits, with their status to be determined after ten years. India would grant citizenship to those who applied for it.
- c. The rest, numbering 300,000, would be accepted as Indian citizens and compulsorily repatriated over a period of time.
- d. These steps would form an integral scheme of settlement of the problem.⁶

The two prime ministers and the Indian high commissioner met in London, but the consensus reached did not materialize. India determined that 700,000 should be granted Ceylon citizenship, and it did not agree with compulsory repatriation.

Nehru-Kotelawala Pact

On 16 January 1954 Prime Minister Kotelawala reached agreement with the Indian government on the following:

1. Both governments to suppress illicit immigration between the two countries.
2. Government of Ceylon to undertake the preparation of a register of all adult residents who are not already on the electoral register. Any Tamil speaking person not so registered to be deemed to be an illicit immigrant. The Indian High Commission will extend all facilities for his or her deportation.
3. Government of Ceylon may proceed with the Immigrants and Emigrants Amendment Bill which shifts the burden on the accused to prove that he is not an illicit immigrant. But, before any person is prosecuted the Government of Ceylon will give an opportunity to the Indian High Commissioner to satisfy himself that a *prima facie* case exists for such prosecution, the final decision being that of the Government of Ceylon.
4. The registration of citizens under the Indian and Pakistani (Citizenship) Act will be expedited and every endeavour will be made to complete the disposal of pending applications within two years.
5. All persons registered under this Act may be placed on a separate electoral register. This arrangement will last for a period of only ten years. In constituencies where the number of registered citizen voters is not likely to exceed 250 they shall be put on a national register.
6. Citizens whose names are placed in a separate electoral register will be entitled to elect a certain number of members to the House of Representatives, the number being determined after consultation with the Prime Minister of India. The government of Ceylon expects to complete their action in this respect before the present Parliament is dissolved.
7. With regard to those persons not so registered it would be open to them to register themselves as Indian citizens if they so choose at the office of the Indian High Commission in accordance with Article 8 of the Constitution of India. It is noted that Ceylon proposed to offer special inducements to encourage such registration. The Government of India will offer administrative and similar facilities to all persons of Indian origin to register themselves as Indian citizens under the Constitution of India, if they so choose.
8. Both Prime Ministers are desirous of continuing the present practice of close consultation between the two Governments in matters affecting their mutual interest.⁷

The Nehru-Kotelawala Pact was commented on in the press in India and Ceylon. In India some newspapers thought that the Indian government had not made an in-depth study of the subject. Later, Nehru noted certain flaws in the agreement.⁸ Some newspapers in Ceylon hailed the pact.

At the end of 1954, with the above agreement not in operation, prime ministers Nehru and Kotelawala entered into another agreement.

1. Indian High Commissioner in Ceylon to grant facilities to those who, with necessary qualifications, wish to register themselves as Indian citizens.
2. Ceylon Government to simplify and dispose of the applications for Ceylon citizenship as agreed earlier.
3. Ceylon government to issue Identity Certificates for travel to those whose citizenship applications were still pending.
4. Ceylon government to permit Indians employed in Ceylon (who might become India citizens) to continue in employment until the age of 55.⁹

There were many obstacles in implementing the second agreement. There was evidence that the commissioner for registration was rejecting applications for Ceylon citizenship on frivolous grounds. Criticism was also leveled at the Indian High Commission for obstructing people from being registered as Indian citizens.¹⁰ In 1954, of the 8,163 persons of Indian origin who applied, 5,163 were accepted as Indian nationals, and 2,545 cases were pending.¹¹

Separate Representation Act

The government of Ceylon, in keeping with the Nehru-Kotelawala Pact, enacted legislation to provide representation to people who had been registered as Ceylon citizens. The Ceylon Constitution (Special Provisions) Act No. 35 was passed in July 1954. The number of members of parliament was increased from 101 to 105. The four additional members were to represent an islandwide Indian and Pakistani electoral district constituted under the Indian and Pakistani (Parliamentary Representation) Act No. 36 of 1954.¹²

Repeal of Separate Representation Act

After the victory of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in the 1956 election, he took steps to repeal the Separate Representation Act. He stated in parliament:

The question arose whether we should proceed to hold elections under that Act or whether we should bring all these people into the general voters list. I think that the entire Cabinet was of the opinion that it was anomalous to separate citizens this way, and the Cabinet was not at all satisfied with the arrangements urged by the previous Government for this step ... I was not party to the original Pact at all. I opposed it on the floor of the House. Indeed I opposed this provision for having these people on a separate electoral list.¹³

Bandaranaike was supported by Pieter Keuneman, who said in parliament:

They are citizens of Ceylon who have satisfied rigorous requirements of the Citizenship Act; these camels have got through the eye of the needle. But once they are citizens of Ceylon what justification is there for treating them differently from the other citizens of Ceylon? Why should we treat these people like second grade citizens? Let me say that this was introduced not to solve the Indian problem in this country or to give any relief to the million-odd people of Indian origin but for the purpose of a bluff directed for foreign consumption, to prove to persons abroad that we are giving some representation to the Indians ... the real intention was to hide the fact there were one million-odd persons without any votes or any hope of getting votes ... Let the people see the problem in all its nakedness; let the problem be known to the whole world.¹⁴

Sirima-Shastri Pact

On 30 October 1964 Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka and Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri of India signed an agreement whereby 300,000 persons, and their natural increase, would be granted Ceylon citizenship, and 525,000 Indian citizenship. The future of 150,000 would be considered at a later date. People who were employed on the date of implementation of the agreement could continue to work until they reached the age of 55, or until they voluntarily left the island. Each family was entitled to take assets to the value of Rs. 4,000. Repatriation would be completed within 15 years.

The pact was criticized in both countries. In India critics included the chief minister in Madras, C. Rajagopalachari. The Ceylon Workers Congress released the following statement: "While welcoming the

determined effort on the part of the two Governments to reach a full settlement, the Executive Committee of the Ceylon Workers Congress views with grave concern the incomplete nature and the arbitrary manner in which the number to be repatriated and absorbed have been fixed."

A. Aziz, president of the Democratic Workers Congress stated regarding the 1964 pact: "The defects in the agreement provide evidence that those who were responsible for the agreement did not treat this problem as a human one but in an effort to solve a political tangle regarding the people concerned as a commodity rather than human beings."

S. Nadesan, president of the United Plantation Workers, stated: The Indo-Ceylon issue is a human problem and therefore cannot be justly solved by treating it as a mere problem of numbers. All those people especially the plantation workers who have made this country their permanent home, must be entitled to their fundamental rights."

S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, leader of the Federal Party, stated: "It is a sad fate that the majority of the 525,000 persons are to be bodily shifted from one country to another without their consent."¹⁵

In December 1964 C.S. Jha, commonwealth secretary for foreign affairs in India, held discussions with a delegation led by N.Q. Dias, Ceylon's secretary for foreign affairs, on the implementation of the pact. It was decided to form a joint committee, one member from each country, to oversee difficulties arising from implementation. It was agreed that 35,000 people would be repatriated annually, while 20,000 would be granted Ceylon citizenship.

During this period Prime Minister Bandaranaike revived the idea of a separate electoral register, which her husband had abandoned. She said: "All people of Indian origin who have attained Ceylon citizenship should be placed in a separate electoral register. This matter was not discussed at New Delhi as this is a matter wholly for the determination by our sovereign parliament."¹⁶ C.S. Jha responded that: "If registered citizens were enrolled in a separate register they would be relegated to the status of only second class or inferior citizens."

Bandaranaike was heavily criticized in India. Minister of External Affairs Swaran Singh said in the Lok Sabha that: "No mention of such a

proposal was made by the Ceylon delegation at the Delhi talks."¹⁷ An editorial in *The Hindu* stated: "The Ceylon Government's proposal to place those granted Ceylon citizenship in a separate register was so clearly a violation of the spirit of the agreement that by itself it could wreck it all."¹⁸ Lal Bahadur Shastri, in a letter addressed to Bandaranaike, stated:

... despite the heavy burdens falling on us under the agreement, the agreement's main attraction for us was the consideration that those accepted as Ceylon citizens would become full-fledged Ceylon citizens and join the mainstream of Ceylon's civil life. The announcement of Ceylon Government's intention would, however, mean that Ceylon citizens of Indian origin would be inassimilable with the rest of the population unlike other Ceylon citizens, entitled to influence only a very limited spectrum of Ceylon's political life. The lesson of history in many lands is that where a religious or ethnic group has been placed apart from the rest of the people and brought on to a separate electoral roll, not only has assimilation become so difficult but separation had been intensified giving rise to disunity and conflict. We ourselves have had a sad experience of this in the past. During the talks in Delhi, the question as to whether persons accepted as Ceylon citizens would be placed on a separate or common electoral roll was not discussed.¹⁹

However, these proposals were not implemented due to the fall of Bandaranaike's government in 1964 on a vote of no confidence.

Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1974

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Prime Minister Bandaranaike agreed that each country would grant citizenship to 50% of the 150,000 left out of the 1964 pact. Of the total 975,000 persons of Indian origin, 375,000 would be granted Sri Lankan citizenship, and 600,000 Indian citizenship. Of this 600,000, only 506,000 had applied to the Indian High Commission; the remaining 94,000 had applied for Sri Lankan citizenship.

Viewpoint of the Communist Party

On the questions of the stateless, the 11th Congress of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, held in March 1980, said in its report as follows:

The fundamental questions of the upcountry Tamils, the majority of whom are plantation workers, remains that of statelessness and exclusion from the country's democratic process. Neither the citizenship acts of the United National Party nor the 1964 Indo-Ceylon Pact negotiated by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party government has solved the problem of statelessness. Still five lakhs of persons remain as 'stateless.'

This Congress demands that decisive action is taken now to solve the problem of statelessness fully and forever.

The congress further resolved:

1. All persons, who have applied for the Sri Lanka citizenship under the 1964 and 1974 Indo-Sri Lanka agreements, but who were not registered as such before the agreements lapsed should immediately be given Sri Lanka citizenship.
2. All other stateless persons of Indian origin resident in Sri Lanka should be given a definite date before which they should apply for Sri Lankan citizenship and should be given such citizenship.
3. Discussions should be held with the Government of India to evolve a scheme whereby both those persons who applied for Indian citizenship under the 1964 and 1974 agreements and are still in Sri Lanka, and those others who apply for Indian citizenship under the new opportunity provided are accepted as Indian citizens and can return to India at retiring age or at any time that they voluntarily decide to do so.

All necessary steps should be taken to see that those who become Sri Lankans are able to do so on a basis of equality with other citizens. In this connection, all estate schools and dispensaries should be incorporated into the national systems of education and health, and the 'line' system under which these people are segregated on estates should be abolished and replaced with proper housing that corresponds to the needs of settled communities.

The upcountry Tamils the majority of whom are plantation workers constitute a great source of strength for the working class of our country. In addition to ending their exclusion from the democratic process, the separation (introduced by the bourgeois leaders) that exists between them and the rest of the organized working class movement should be speedily ended. They should be more and more associated in common struggles and common class organizations with the mainstream of the working class movement.

The Communist Party of Sri Lanka appeals to all left and democratic forces, both among the Sinhalese people and the national minorities, to come together in support of such a programme that can not only help to replace racial suspicion and animosities with feelings of mutual trust, but also unite all left and democratic forces in the fight against neocolonialism and capitalist domination and for a bright socialist future.²⁰

Aftermath

India agreed to process the 506,000 within six to eight months of Sri Lanka granting citizenship to its required number. Sri Lanka finally passed such legislation as the Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act No. 5 of 1986.

Speaking in parliament on the grant of citizenship to the 94,600 persons, MP Sarath Muttetuwegama stated (with several questions from MPs)²¹:

The Honourable Prime Minister (R. Premadasa) asked a pertinent question from the Honourable Member for Parliament Mr. Lakshman Jayakody. He posed the question when citizenship is granted to 94,600 persons you say that a referendum should be held whereas when citizenship was granted to 375,000 persons why did you not ask for a referendum? I am in agreement with the Honourable Prime Minister on that point and I wish to pose the same question from those who are opposing this Bill. When you granted honorary citizenship did you hold referendums? Did you seek permission from any one before granting honorary citizenship? No worker who bears the scorching heat or the storming rains whilst he had toiled was ever granted honorary citizenship. I have with me a list of persons on whom honorary citizenship was conferred. The Honourable MP Mr. Macan Markar on 22nd April 1960 wanted the then Prime Minister to answer in writing giving details of the names of persons on whom honorary citizenship was conferred. I am mentioning some of the names:

1. Jamset G. Dadabose
2. Abdul Hussain Sheik Abdulla Bose
3. Mohamed Ali Sheik Abdulla Bose
4. Zahir Ibrahim Jaferjee

What is the service they have rendered to this country? Being occupied in Pettah, Dam Street, and Bankshall Street they have successfully exploited the people. It is for this purpose you have granted honorary citizenship to these people. I shall read a few more names.

Isajee Karimjee, Gulam Abdul Karimjee, Askar Abdul Hussain Jaferjee, Hasana Ali Yousuf Ali, Basul Abas Gulam Hussain. These persons were made honorary citizens in 1949.

In 1950 the following persons were made honorary citizens: Robert Sangston Seman, Busas Hussain Mohamed Ali, H.C.K. Rustomjee, Jeewatram Darmas Hastiramani.

In 1951 H. Gulam Hussein, Kundanmal, Kadibhoy were made honorary citizens. Who conferred these citizenships? How were they given? No one knows. There were no referendum conducted prior to granting honorary

citizenship to these person. In 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960 honorary citizenship was granted. I have the list of names with me. I have obtained it from the *Hansard*.

A Member: From where did you get this list?

Muttetuwegama: They are in the *Hansard*. Please refer to the 38th edition of the *Hansard* dated 22nd April 1960, page 903-916.

A Member: How was it in 1956?

Muttetuwegama: After the change of Government, in 1957 the following were granted honorary citizenship: Miskin Mohamed Ali, Diriyani, Abuthahir. In 1958 the following were granted honorary citizenship: Natarajan Hirnan, Abdul Hussain.

Speaking further, Muttetuwegama said: "By granting citizenship to 94,600 persons, only a minimal percentage of Indian Tamil population will increase in the electoral register, maybe by 1%. This increase will not harm any one."

In 1988 the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons (Special Provisions) Act No. 39 covered 233,000 persons, who would be granted citizenship within a period of 18 months by tendering an affidavit. Sections 2 and 4 stated:

2. Notwithstanding the provisions of any other law every person who

a. is of Indian origin lawfully in Sri Lanka

b. is stateless

c. is not within the 506,000 persons referred to in the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless persons Act No. 5 of 1986 who have applied to the Indian High Commission for the Grant of Indian Citizenship and the children born to them after October 1964, shall have the status of Citizen of Sri Lanka with effect from the date of the commencement of this Act and shall be entitled to all the rights and privileges to which other citizens of Sri Lanka are entitled to by law.

4(1) Any person who is a citizen of Sri Lanka by reason of the provisions of section 2 of this Act may if he so desires apply, to the Commissioner for a Certificate of Citizenship substantially in the form set out in Schedule A to this Act and the Commissioner shall, subject to the provisions of subsection (3) of this section, issue a certificate within sixty days of the receipt of such application by him and such certificate shall be substantially in the form set out in Schedule B to this Act.

(2) Such application shall be accompanied by a declaration under oath or affirmation substantially in the form set out in Schedule A to this Act.

This created a situation where an affidavit could be sworn for the purpose of obtaining citizenship. The evolutionary manner in which the citizenship issue has taken shape and the many players involved in resolving this longstanding national questions must serve as a reminder of the many struggles waged by plantation workers to gain their lost rights.

Endnotes

¹ S. Nadesan, *A History of the Up-Country Tamil People* (Kandy: A. Nandalala Publication, 1993), 156.

² T.B. Ilangaratne was a government servant who lost his job due to the 1952 general strike. He later entered the cabinet of Mrs. Bandaranaike.

³ ⁴ S. Nadesan, *A History of the Up-Country Tamil People*.

⁵ Nadesan.

⁶ T. Sabaratnam, *My Life and Times*.

⁷ T. Sabaratnam.

⁸ S. Choudry, *Foreign Affairs Reports*.

⁹ Nadesan, 171.

¹⁰ Nadesan.

¹¹ *The Hindu*, 17 April 1955.

¹² Nadesan.

¹³ Nadesan.

¹⁴ *Forward*, Speeches of Pieter Keuneman.

¹⁵ Nadesan.

¹⁶ *Ceylon Daily News*, 12 November 1964.

¹⁷ *Ceylon Daily News*, 24 November 1964.

¹⁸ *The Hindu*, 22 December 1964.

¹⁹ *Indian Express*, 2 March 1967.

²⁰ Communist Party of Sri Lanka, "Congress Report."

²¹ Muttetuwegama was a politburo member of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, and an MP from Kalawana in the Ratnapura District.



Sarath Muttetuwagama

CHAPTER 9

THE MAJOR TRADE UNIONS SPLIT

In 1939 there were two main organizations that dealt with issues concerning the plantation community, the Ceylon Indian Central Association and the Ceylon Indian National Congress. It was suggested that all Indians should be brought under one umbrella organization, and this led to the formation of the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC) in July. V.A. Lakshman Chettiar was the first president, and H.M. Desai and A. Aziz were elected as joint secretaries.¹ The inaugural session of the CIC was held in Gampola, with large attendance. V.V. Giri, a veteran trade unionist, and S. Satiyamoorthy, a leader of the Indian National Congress, also participated.²

Plantation management refused to discuss labour-related problems with the CIC on the basis that it was not prepared to negotiate with political parties. This led to the formation of a trade union wing known as the Ceylon Indian Congress Labour Union.

Different opinions were held by S. Thondaman and A. Aziz, based on ideological grounds. Both contested for party president after the second session held in Kandy in 1942. At the general council meeting, Aziz obtained 31 votes and Thondaman 19.³

Trade union leaders were prohibited from entering estates. With unrest and strikes increasing Labour Minister G.C.S. Corea was compelled to summon trade union leaders and the Employers Federation, out of which came a seven-point agreement.

In 1942 Geoffrey Layton, in control of the colony, ordered a freeze in the dearness allowance of plantation workers. The CIC wanted Aziz to negotiate with Layton, who flatly refused. He later changed his mind

due to the unrest. At the March 1943 session of the CIC, Aziz criticized the government severely. He was prosecuted for causing disaffection against the government and sabotaging the war effort. In 1945 Thondaman was elected as CIC president.

At the 1945 CIC congress held at Hatton, it was decided to change the name of the organization to the Ceylon Democratic Congress, and to rename the union organization as the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC). In 1954 the Thondaman-Aziz rivalry deepened.

Ceylon Workers Congress Splits

The Democratic Workers Congress was founded in 1956 by Aziz, C.V. Vellupillai, S.M. Subbiah and K.G.S. Nair. However, the new trade union was not recognized by the Employers Federation until the strike at the Dayagama Estate, Agrapatna, during which the worker Abramsingho was shot dead by police. Prime Minister Bandaranaike called a conference of trade unions, the commissioner of labour and the Employers Federation. He declared: "Gentlemen, here is a trade union calling for recognition, thousands of workers are on strike and we cannot allow such a situation to continue." He further stated: "The Democratic Workers Congress is a legitimate trade union, surely there cannot be any difficulty in recognizing the DWC."⁴

The major struggle launched by the DWC was the 17/50 campaign. The Public Services Trade Union agitated for a wage increase. Prime Minister Bandaranaike agreed to grant an interim Special Living Allowance of 17/50 per month to public sector workers. The special living allowance was granted to workers in the tea and rubber export trade, since a collective agreement had been signed by left trade unions and the Employers Federation. In 1965 this agreement was extended to estate staff through an agreement between the Ceylon Estate Staff's Union and the Ceylon Estate Employers Federation.

Estate workers themselves were denied the special living allowance. The DWC called on them to resort to trade union action. Initially, workers joined, irrespective of union affiliation, but at a later stage one section of workers pulled out. After 45 days the strike was called off.

CWC leader Thondaman, an appointed member of parliament during Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake's government, entered into Collective Agreement No. 3 of 1967 with the Ceylon Estate Employers Federation; the agreement granted a small wage increase of Rs. 10 per day.

The CWC and DWC Unite

The split in these unions resulted in a breach between workers, and many wanted to unite the two organizations. There was support for this in the Tamil media, including in the paper *Thinakaran*.⁵ P.T. Thanu Pillai, a founder of the CIC, was entrusted with negotiating with the leaders, and in December 1959 the core issues at stake were settled. It was agreed that the CWC would function as a trade union, while the DWC would operate as the political wing, under the name of the Ceylon Democratic Congress. The agreement was signed by Thondaman, Somasunderam, Rajalingam and Ramanujam on behalf of the CWC, and Aziz, K.G.S. Nair and P.S.V. Naidu on behalf of the DWC. A joint statement was issued:

We have been holding talks for the past few weeks to reconcile differences which have kept the plantation workers divided. From today, December 23rd 1959 the two congresses will merge into one, in order to serve the interests of the plantation community effectively and to take forward the struggle of the plantation worker with vigour.⁶

However, this unity did not last long, and the unions continued to function as two separate entities.

Split in the Democratic Workers Congress

The DWC emerged as a strong union, but there was internal dissatisfaction resulting in left-oriented leaders leaving. They included S. Nadesan and P. P. Devaraj.⁷ They joined the Ceylon Plantation Workers Union, which was affiliated to the Ceylon Trade Union Federation, led by the Ceylon Communist Party. Others who subsequently joined this

union included C.V. Velupillai, S.M. Subbiah, Rozario Fernando, E.T. Moorthy, A. Ramiah, S. Mariappa and P.P. Kandiah.⁸

At the session of the Ceylon Plantation Workers Union held in Hatton in 1962, N. Sanmugathasan was elected president and S. Nadesan the general secretary. Following the split in the world communist movement into Moscow and Beijing wings, the Ceylon Plantation Workers Union split. S. Nadesan founded the United Plantation Workers Union, in Matale, in early 1964; this union was under the Communist Party (Moscow wing).⁹

National Union of Workers

Within the CWC there were differences between Thondaman and V.K. Vellayan. While Prime Minister Dudley Senanayke was in office a Senate position became vacant, and many thought Vellayan should be appointed. He was not, and his supporters pulled out of the CWC, forming the National Union of Workers. Jesudason of the CWC was appointed senator.

Emergence of the Up-Country People's Front

The front was formed by P. Chandrasekaran, the youth leader of the CWC. Its trade union wing was the Up-Country Workers Front. Several left-oriented people joined the front. One founding member, B.A. Cader, later left to form his own party.¹⁰

Endnotes

¹ T. Sabaratnam, *Out of Bondage*, 25. V.A. Lakshman Chettiar was elected to the Puthukottai electorate in the Madras Presidency.

² Sabaratnam, 28.

³ Sabaratnam, 31.

⁴ S. Nadesan, *A History of the Up-Country Tamil People in Sri Lanka* (Kandy: A. Nandalala Publication, 1993), 243.

⁵ Sabaratnam, 76.

⁶ Sabaratnam, 76.

⁷ Sabaratnam.

⁸ Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, *Report*.

⁹ Sabaratnam.

¹⁰ Sabaratnam, 243.

CHAPTER 10

THE UNP AND SLFP GOVERNMENTS (1970-)

The Government of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1970-1977)

The early part of Prime Minister Bandaranaike's rule witnessed the insurrection of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), in which rural youth staged an armed struggle that was ruthlessly suppressed. The JVP conducted classes for its cadres, including one on its theory of Indian expansionism; the party viewed the plantation workers as appendages of Indian imperialism.

In 1972 a new constitution was adopted. K.M. de Silva commented:

The new balance of forces, of which the principal feature was the dominance of the Sinhalese and the Buddhists in the Sri Lanka polity, was effectively consolidated with the victory of the United Front coalition in May 1970. Although an undercurrent of hostility to the Tamils, indigenous and Indian, was discernible from the outset, the adoption of the new Constitution in 1972 was the critical starting point in a new phase in communal antagonism on the island, especially in regard to relations between the Sinhalese and the indigenous Tamils. Indeed, the new Constitution accurately reflected the new balance of forces.

The two main points at issue were language rights and religion. In regard to the latter, Chapter 11 of the Constitution laid down that: 'The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights secured by Section 18(1)(d).' With this, Sri Lanka ceased to be a secular state, pure and simple, even if it did not become the theocratic State which Buddhist pressure groups would have liked it to be.¹

The safeguard accorded to minorities by section 29(2) of the Soulbury Constitution was removed, thus creating the impression that the rights of minorities were no longer safe. This resulted in the Ceylon Workers Congress joining the two major Tamil parties, the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress, to form the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1976.

After Bandaranaike came into office, there were food shortages. The price of imported rice increased and the prices of export products decreased. Further, the world market price of wheat increased, and the government imposed a ceiling on the import of wheat flour. There was a scarcity of essential foods, which severely affected the people. There were queues to purchase bread and other items. The situation of the plantation workers was deplorable, and starvation and poverty increased in this sector.

Nationalization and the Plantations

When the government introduced the Land Reform Law No. 1 of 1972, Hector Kobbekaduwe stated during the second reading of the bill:

In this matter I wish to give some particulars of the estates that are to be taken over. There are 396 estates owned by 232 Public Companies, 87 are Sterling Companies and 145 are Rupee Companies. The 87 Sterling Companies own 191 estates and the 145 Rupee Companies own 205 estates. The total acreage owned or possessed by these Public Companies is 415,498.

The crop acreage are as follows: tea 292,126; rubber 110,021; coconut 8,036; others 5,325.

Of the 396 estates, 376 are managed by 22 agency houses, 20 are managed by the owning companies. The largest concentration of Public Company owned estates is in the following Districts²:

District	Acreage	District	Acreage
Nuwara Eliya	82,171	Galle	21,288
Kandy	76,963	Matara	4,819
Badulla	77,973	Puttalam	4,819
Ratnapura	50,352	Kurunegala	6,031
Kegalle	42,764	Matale	13,167
Colombo	9,418	Moneragala	2,031
Kalutara	27,756		

At the time, 5,500 families owned 1.2 million acres of land, of which 550,000 acres were to be distributed or used as youth colonies.³ The acquired land was vested in the Uda Rata Co-operative Estate Development Board, the Janatha Estates Development Board, and the State Plantation Corporation.

The ceiling on land holding, although broadly speaking a progressive step, would be effective only if the state could control and manage the estates properly. Nationalization by a capitalist state and government, and state control under a capitalist system, do not make workers the sole owners and possessors of the means of production and distribution; state monopoly capitalism does not benefit the mass of people.

After the government acquired the land, mismanagement and corruption were rampant. The government appointed people who had no experience in estate management and had no managerial skills whatsoever, and even illiterate persons who had political patronage, to positions of project managers and assistant project managers. There were cases where co-operative employees, peons, bus conductors and other minor employees were appointed as project managers. Certain superintendents were reappointed as project managers. Estate staff were told that they would be taken on again as new recruits. Some land was acquired even prior to the passage of the Land Reform Law and the Land Acquisition Act, since the owners had supported the UNP during the 1970 election.

It was believed that nationalization would benefit the workers, but the presence of unskilled managers led to chaos on the estates and the dismissal of workers, forcible eviction from their homes and a refusal to negotiate with trade unions. Hostility was shown towards trade unions, and sometimes to labour officers who intervened to settle disputes. The government gazetted the Emergency (Preservation of Public Order on Estates) No. 3 of 1975 (notification no. 186/60), whereby the chairman of the Land Reform Commission could evict a resident worker if, in his opinion, this was necessary to preserve public order. These laws were used to evict workers in order to grant land to political supporters and lumpen elements who assisted politicians during the election campaign.

An example of this was seen in Choicy and Balapokuna estates in the Punduluoya area, where workers were virtually chased away.⁴ On Choicy Estate workers were ordered to leave the estate by mid-December 1976. The plantation trade unions launched a strike, and the commissioner of labour convened a conference on 11 May 1977. The authorities assured that workers would not be driven away, and that land would be allocated to everyone without discrimination. However, almost immediately thugs and lumpen elements associated with the Ministry of Agriculture and armed with swords and clubs invaded Sanquar Estate, Pussellawa, and looted the homes of workers. On 17 May the homes of workers on Delta Estate, Pussellawa, were looted and set on fire.

In 1977 a commission was set up to inquire into the racial riots that occurred just after the 1977 election. Commissioner M.S. Sansoni, a retired Supreme Court judge, stated in his report:

I would also refer ... to the considerable turmoil that existed in certain tea plantation areas in the first half of 1977, after the nationalization of estates, particularly in Gampola, Pussellawa and Kotmale districts. Tamil citizens by descent or registration were ignored and Sinhalese peasants were preferred when estate land was alienated and reallocated. The Tamil estate workers in several estates were thrown out of them. Their displacement in a heartless manner was followed by the shooting of workers on Devon Estate, and looting, arson and physical violence

on Sanquar and Delta estates, in a wave of communal terrorism. Evidence was given by M.K. Suppiah, industrial relations officer of the CWC, who spoke about estate workers on Choicy and Balapokuna estates being chased out by a gang of men who called themselves a people's committee, and were led by a member of parliament. The same lawlessness took place on Darty, Mulgama and Orion estates in Gampola.⁵

Workers were chased away from estates under the guise of land alienation to state-sponsored institutions. The National Agricultural Diversification and Settlement Authority was allocated 26,000 acres for an ill conceived project that did not achieve the projected profits.

The plantation industry, managed by agency houses and capitalists, did yield great profits, but workers did not benefit. N. Ramachandran summed up as follows:

a. That because the plantation industry was developed by utilizing two basic factors of production land and labour which were very cheaply available, there resulted in the production of high surplus value and the building up thereby of an elaborate and monopolistic system of high profits for investors as well as high salaries and income for everyone in the upper echelons of the hierarchy which dominates and exploits the industry (example, the estate superintendents and managers, the agents and secretaries connected with agency houses).

b. That in view of the agency house system and the salaries, fees and commissions that go to those in the upper echelons, Sri Lanka has been deprived of a large share of revenue from the tea industry because of the high cost of production coupled with the high profits that have to be sent out.

c. That in effect a large portion of the profits is appropriated by the middle man who in this particular case has close nexus and connections and vested interests with the producers.

d. That since the agency house system involved payments of large sums by way of agents' and secretaries' fees involved payments of large sums and commissions the size of which depends on the quantity of produce exported from this country, companies for the most part managed by the agency houses appear to commemorate more on the quantity of tea produced rather than on maximizing profits in relation to each estate that has to be locally managed as a viable unit.

e. That the many interlocking vested interests ensure the transference abroad of considerable amounts of money by way of profit dividends,

managerial costs, and various other trade charges such as shipping insurance, etc.

f. That the disinvestment policies of company vested interests have led them to make substantial investments abroad, especially in East Africa for the purpose of building up a new tea industry.

g. That there has been a loss of much foreign exchange incurred by Sri Lanka by way of allowance in the form of lump sum depreciation, enjoyment of special facilities concessions, setting up of holding companies.

h. That Sri Lanka has in addition to granting many concessions provides a large amount of state aid to the plantation industry (Rs. 410 million being given away by way of subsidies and rebates on development from 1950 to 1972).

i. That through the activities of the multinational corporations having a stake in the tea trade large profits have been reaped abroad through currency arbitrage by the exploitation of floating exchange rates, etc., which have now become a feature of the international monetary system.

j. That despite a certain economic growth and limited development brought to Sri Lanka as a result of plantation industry the persistent backwardness and underdevelopment of the rural sector of Sri Lanka and the depressed and unenviable condition of the plantation worker have to be largely attributed to the manner in which the plantation industry was developed as a colonial economy enabling the extraction of high profits and large 'spoils.'

This survey shows the profits reaped by the plantation industry and therefore the question arises: Was the capitalist state ready to undertake a large industry merely for the sake of acquisition without adequate consideration of the overall impact which it could have on the national economy?⁶

The Government misled the people to think that the mere takeover of the estates is moving towards Socialism. It must be noted that there is a difference of ownership and the control of the productive forces under a capitalist regime unlike ownership by the proletariat.

One cannot equate the transformation of ownership which occurred after the October revolution in the then Soviet Union under a proletarian State and nationalization undertaken by a bourgeois Government and in retrospect it has to be mentioned even after the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia nationalization was implemented in stages and needless to say that firstly the wealth of the comprador class was nationalized

under the proletarian State supervision and this is inevitable due to the change in the mode of production.

The UNP Regimes – J.R. Jayewardene and R. Premadasa (1977-1994)

In the 1977 general election the UNP under J.R. Jayewardene won a 2/3 majority, 140 of 168 seats in parliament. Many veteran politicians in the previous government lost their seats. Within days there was an incident at St. Patrick's College in Jaffna, when two policemen tried to enter a carnival without paying. An argument ensued, which escalated into a clash, and soon into communal violence that spread to the central and southern parts of the country. The government did not stop the violence at the initial stage.

The worst affected areas were Matale and Kandy. Refugee camps had to be set up, with the one at Muthu Mariaman Temple, Matale, housing 7,000 people. Indian High Commissioner Gurbachan Singh visited the camp and assured refugees that the Indian government would take up the issue with Prime Minister Jayewardene and stress the need of the refugees to return to their homes and live in security. Minister of Agriculture and Lands E.L. Senanayake stated in parliament: "I come from a city where Tamils, Muslims, Sinhalese, Burghers and Malays have lived in amity over a century ... but if you come to Kandy and see today what has happened ... you will think that we have gone back to the dark ages ... Tamil girls have been raped."⁷ Many people were afraid to return to their homes, and some migrated to India, while others went to live in Vavuniya, Kilinochchi and Mannar. The government appointed the Sansoni Commission to inquire into the circumstances which led to the riots. TULF MP A. Amirthalingam stated in parliament:

For over the last 30 years the leaders of the Tamil community have tried desperately to live in peace and harmony, to live as brothers with the Sinhalese people. The Hon. Prime Minister [J.R. Jayewardene] has told us that the people are saying if you want a fight let there be a fight ... if it is peace let there be peace. I say on behalf of the Tamil people, that we are a most peaceful people. We want peace but not peace at any cost.⁸

In 1978 a new constitution was adopted. Article 19 declared that Sinhala and Tamil would be the national languages of Sri Lanka. Sinhala would remain the official language. This marked a departure from the language policy adopted in 1956. Article 26 abolished the distinction between citizens by descent and citizens by registration, which removed the stigma of second-class citizenship to people of Indian origin. The constitution also afforded to 'stateless' persons the same civil rights as guaranteed to citizens.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

Minister of Justice K.W. Devanayagam introduced the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act, which was passed in 1979. It was said that the law would be a temporary measure, and the TULF did not oppose the bill. The only MP who spoke of the dangers of the bill was Maithripala Senanayake of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, representing the Medawachchiya electorate. Civil society and human rights organizations opposed the law as a threat to freedom of expression and thought, and free political activity; of particular concern were procedures regarding arrest and detention. In the end, the law was used to curb the activities of political opponents.

August 1981 Riots

In the Sabaragamuwa Province a communal clash erupted causing wanton damage to life and property. Some plantation workers were directly affected. Many people fled by foot from Balangoda to Bogawantalawa through jungle paths to save their lives. Refugee camps were set up in Bogawantalawa and Colombo. The Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality wrote:

The five days of commando style gang attacks in Ratnapura on 12th August and successive days thereafter in Pelmadulla, Kahawatte, Rakwana and finally Balangoda brought death and destruction to the impoverished Indian Tamil estate workers scattered among forty estates in the whole district of Ratnapura. Their line dwellings were set ablaze and their belongings destroyed, as thousands fled for the safety of their lives, either to the several refugee camps set up in schools and churches

or to the adjoining jungles. The numbers affected have been estimated to be in the region of 30 to 40 thousand. A large number of refugees had later to be evacuated to the main Hindu temple in Colombo, to be under the care of the indefatigable organizers of the TRRO (Tamil Refugee Rehabilitation Organization).⁹

An editorial in *The Sun* newspaper stated:

The latest report shows that goondas have also started to run amok and there is widespread looting and pillage ... since August 1977 we have witnessed many wanton racial murders. Except to declare a state of Emergency here and Emergency there, what has the Government done to round up the mischief makers, nay murderers, and wipe out the murderers from the face of Lanka? The first duty of any Government is to ensure the safety of its citizens. Judged by that yardstick we regret to have to record that the present administration stands naked. We ask the Government to act fast and use all means at its command to stifle racial dissension, and impeach all those responsible for inflaming racial hatred in our midst. Mother Lanka is in travail and demands it.¹⁰

The Hindu reported: "The Indian High Commissioner Mr. Thomas Abraham called on the Foreign Office to convey his Government's concern over reports of attacks on Indian Tamils on different estates. Mr. Abraham said most of the refugees held Sri Lankan passports. He was helpless in the matter. He could seek protection for Indian passport holders only."¹¹

President Jayewardene, addressing the Executive Committee of the UNP, said:

I speak more in sorrow than in anger. Recent events throughout the island, north, centre and south, show that religions we profess do not seem to influence for the good of some of our people. I regret that some members of my party have spoken in Parliament and outside, words that encourage violence and the murders, rape and arson that have been committed.

How many of our party leaders throughout the country have spoken against the recent acts of violence? I must have reasons to be proud of the party of which I am leader. If I cannot it is better for me to retire from the leadership of this party and let those who believe that the harming of innocent people and property that has happened recently is the way to solve the problems that face this multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-caste society, take the leadership of the party.¹²

The genuineness of this statement is questionable. G.V. Punchinilame, MP for Ratnapura, was removed as the deputy minister for regional development in April 1983, due to his probable involvement in the riots; he was then appointed as deputy minister for state plantations.

1983 Racial Riots

23 July 1983 was a tragic day in the history of the country. Communal clashes had occurred since 1915, but the riots of 1983 surpassed all others, causing the most death and destruction of property ever to innocent Tamil people. After 13 soldiers were killed in Jaffna on 22 July, their bodies were brought to Colombo for burial. An unruly crowd went on the rampage. The government scapegoated three parties as being responsible: the Communist Party, Nava Sama Samaja Party and JVP. Law and order broke down throughout the country, and several towns in plantation areas and other districts were set on fire by thugs and mobs, while security forces watched. L. Piyadasa wrote:

The job was done in Colombo and its suburbs within a matter of hours – much of it between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when the curfew began, but the action continued all afternoon and evening as the army was involved – by about 1 o'clock it looked as though there had been an air raid. We have to consider what the people noticed about the men who led the action. In Kelaniya, Industries Minister Cyril Matthews' gang were identified as the ones at work. The general secretary of the government union, the Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS), was identified as the leader of the gang which wrought destruction and death all over Colombo and especially in Wellawatte. In Pettah (the bazaar area where 442 shops were destroyed and murders committed) the commander was the son of Aloysius Mudalali, the Prime Minister's right hand man ... The thugs who worked regularly for the leaders of the UNP, and in some cases uniformed military personnel and police, were seen leading the attack. They used vehicles of the Sri Lanka Transport Board and other government departments and state corporations. Trucks of the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation oil refinery came from many miles away bringing the men who destroyed so much of Wellawatte. There is evidence of this sort.¹³

Many people of the majority community at the risk of their lives gave shelter to the affected people, and many politicians came forward to prevent the further loss of life and limb, most notably among them: Renuka Herath, MP for Walapane; Anura Daniel, MP for Hewahetta; and Shelton Ranaraja, MP for Senkadagala. P. Rajaratnam, a senior journalist at the Lake House group, recalled:

When the city of Nuwara Eliya was set in flames Ms. Renuka Herath with a group of officials ran hither and thither reprimanding the people who in her presence set fire to the shops in the town. She herself attempted to douse the fire. She called upon the Government Agent of Nuwara Eliya, Mr. Kumar Abeysinghe, and other officials to prevent further escalation of the riots. She along with other Government officials was responsible to set up a camp in the hall known as Cinecita to look after the welfare of the refugees.¹⁴

Wage Struggles of the Plantation Workers

After the UNP came into office in 1977 the cost of living increased. The cost of living index rose from 204.2 in July 1977 to 418.1 in July 1982. Subsidies on such essentials as rice, sugar, milk powder and kerosene were withdrawn, and in September 1979 the food stamp scheme was introduced. The scheme was not extended to estate workers, however, on the pretext that their wages exceeded Rs. 300 per month. Estate workers were affected to such a degree that malnutrition increased. Central Bank publication *The Economic Review*, of March 1982, recorded that: "The overall chronic undernutrition prevalent in the village rural sector is 30.8% as against 62.4% in the estate sector."¹⁵

When the budget was introduced in parliament in 1981, the finance minister granted a wage increase of Rs. 70 to all government employees, but not to plantation workers. The Wages Board for the Tea Growing and Manufacturing Trade was approached, but without success. Thereafter, 14 trade unions formed the Joint Plantation Trade Union Committee (JPTUC) to agitate for this demand. The Ceylon Workers Congress did not participate in the discussions, since S. Thondaman was a cabinet minister. A token strike on 18 August 1981 was a success, with the government granting a wage increase of Rs. 2 per day. Despite the CWC not participating, many of its members did join the strike.

The 1982 budget included a wage increase of Rs. 45 per month, with an allowance of Rs. 2 for every point increase in the cost of living index. Again, the measure was not extended to the plantation sector. The JPTUC called a two-day token strike for 11-12 May 1982, supported by 14 unions. The Ceylon Estate Staff's Union also joined. The Ceylon Mercantile Union called on its members employed in offices of the Janatha Estate Development Board and the Sri Lanka State Plantation Corporation to join the strike in solidarity. The CWC campaigned against the strike and assisted superintendents, who threatened to dismiss striking workers. A writer in *The Christian Worker* stated:

The token strike proved to be a historic one and demonstrated the emergence of a deeper unity among plantation workers and estate staff than ever experienced before. The objective situation of oppression and exploitation in the plantation areas obviously provoked this massive response to the strike by both workers and staff. Despite the fact that the major trade union membership of the plantation workers is claimed by government controlled trade unions, it is noteworthy and of deep political significance that thousands of such workers chose to ignore the order received from Colombo and joined in this common struggle with their brothers and sisters in the plantations. It is estimated that in areas such as Kandy, Dickoya, Dimbulla, Uva, Kalutara and Galle the response from plantation workers and staff to the strike was about 80% ... there was an intensive propaganda effort by the Ceylon Workers Congress in the days preceding the token strike in order to dissuade workers from going on strike. This effort largely failed.¹⁶

1984 General Strike

A. Aziz and S. Nadesan tabled a motion to the Wages Board for Tea Growing and Manufacturing Trade for a Rs. 2 monthly wage increase for each point rise in the cost of living. The board proposed a 11-cent daily increase for 18 days of work per month; employers opposed this. The representative of the Ministry of Labour suggested a compromise: a 6-cent raise for each point the cost of living index rose above 418. This compromise was adopted by the board on 18 February 1983 by a majority of two; however, this was never properly ratified by the commissioner of labour.

When the budget was presented in 1983, it included a wage increase of Rs. 100 to all employees, except in the plantation sector.

Plantation trade unions then submitted a letter on 23 November, signed by 15 unions, including the CWC, informing the government that trade union action would be taken if the following demands were not met:

1. An allowance of Rs. 2 per month for every point increase in the cost of living index.
2. A wage increase of Rs. 100 per month.
3. A guaranteed monthly wage to plantation workers.
4. Equal wages for men and women workers.

While the trade unions were engaged in explaining the demands to workers to prepare them for a strike, the president of the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union and cabinet member Gamini Dissanayake, and the CWC, announced on 19 March that they would jointly strike on 1 April. The JPTUC announced a strike for 2 April. However, to avoid this, the government agreed to some of the demands, but through the union headed by Dissanayake. President Jayewardene (also the Minister of Plantation Industries) held discussions with Dissanayake; they announced a wage increase of Rs. 2/50 per day and equal wages for men and women. The Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union then withdrew from the proposed strike.

The strike was a great success. President Jayewardene stated that the strike would cost the country Rs. 60 million per day, and refused to negotiate until workers returned to work. An editorial in *The Island* stated:

The plantation strike is no April fools joke. Beginning the 1st of April the workers in Sri Lanka's plantations have begun a strike to press for some of their longstanding demands, the chief of which is that they are deprived of the cost of living and other allowances such as salary increases by the successive budgets. The striking workers belong to Minister Thondaman's Ceylon Workers Congress as well as the Joint Plantation Trade Union Committee headed by S. Nadesan and are estimated to number around 600,000.

If any section of the working class deserves a better deal, it is the worker on the estates and, therefore, the government would do well to begin negotiations with the representatives of the plantation trade unions early before an economy, already under siege, is not crippled further by the debilitating effects of inaction in a vital area of the national economy.¹⁷

Several trade unions supported the strike, including: the Ceylon Trade Union Federation, Sri Lanka Independent Trade Union Federation, United Federation of Labour and the Ceylon Mercantile Union. On 5 April a conference was attended by: Minister of Plantation Industries Montague Jayawickrama; Gamini Dissanayake of the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union; S. Thondaman and M.S. Sellasamy of the CWC; S. Nadesan, Rozario Fernando and Alawi Moulana of the JPTUC; C.V. Velupillai of the National Union of Workers; Colvin R. de Silva of the Lanka Estate Workers Union; the chairmen of the Janatha Estate Development Board and the Sri Lanka State Plantation Corporation; Commissioner of Labour G. Weerakoon; and C. Shanmugam from the Treasury Department.

Minister Jayawickrama called on the unions to call off the strike, but they refused. A delegation then went to inform the president of the union demands; the unions agreed to call off the strike if granted an interim cost of living allowance and wage supplement. The president announced he would appoint a special committee to consider the demands, and requested that the strike be unconditionally called off. Presidential Secretary S.L.M. Marikar had drafted a memorandum to this effect, but the unions refused to sign. Unions met at the office of the CWC. The president met with Gamini Dissanayake and Thondaman, and a Rs. 2 per day increase was granted. As a result, the wage on tea estates for men rose from Rs. 18/01 to Rs. 23/75, and on rubber estates from 19/75 to 23/90. Men and women were to be paid equally. A woman's daily wage in the tea sector thus increased by 58%, while men's rose by 38%. The president stated that workers would be offered six days of work per week, and further agreed to appoint a committee to examine worker grievances and submit a report by May. The strike was called off.

The following reasons lay behind the success of the strike:

- a. There was a good flush of tea, and the management could not afford a strike.
- b. Tea was fetching a good price in the world market, between Rs. 60 and 150 per kilo.
- c. The president preferred to hold discussions only with Dissanayake, and thus the CWC participated in the strike and wanted it to succeed.
- d. The International Conference of the Pacific Asia Travel Association was in session in Colombo, and any drastic action by the government against workers would lead to adverse publicity in the world media.
- e. The urban trade union organizations expressed solidarity with the workers, and thus the government could not play the communal card.
- f. The government was not keen to suppress the strike using the security forces since they were engaged against militants in the North.

1988 Strike

The budget for 1988 provided for a wage increase for government employees and increased the minimum monthly wage to Rs. 1,250 for the lowest paid workers. Again, there was no increase for the plantation sector, and on 1 February workers launched a token strike. The government refused to hold talks, presuming that it had the support of the CWC and the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union. However, both unions did support the token strike, and before the end of the month the government granted a wage increase of Rs. 5 per day.

Privatization of Estates

The government was very interested in privatizing the estates. The plantation industry faced several difficulties in managing the estates, including mismanagement, waste, curtailment of inputs and lack of capital. The World Bank advised that private sector involvement would stimulate the industry. The government passed two measures: the Conversion of Public Corporations and Government Owned Business Undertakings into Public Corporations Act No. 22 and Act No. 23 of

1987. According to section 3(1) of the former, relevant business undertakings would vest absolutely in a corporation established by that incorporation order. Once such an incorporation order was made, the registrar of companies would issue a certificate of incorporation. According to section 3(2)(1), all movable and immovable property owned by the corporation or vested in the state would vest in the company.

Prior to privatization the government and unions agreed on certain welfare measures to be undertaken by the government, relating to housing, wage increases, ownership of houses for workers, and allocation of 10% of shares in the company to workers. At the outset, the World Bank and government did not disclose that long-term leases of estate land would be granted to management companies, but this is what happened.

In 1992 the process of privatization began, whereby estates under the Janatha Estates Development Board and the Sri Lanka State Plantation Corporation would be managed by private companies. As a first step, of the 502 estates under these agencies, 449 passed to private management by 22 regional plantation companies. Approximately 95,885 hectares and 306,609 workers on these plantations came directly under company management. In 1995, with regard to the 53 estates not covered, 10 were selected to be managed by 23 private companies, and the balance 43 came under the two state agencies.

Unions that did not support the government opposed this scheme. They addressed a letter to President Premadasa in October 1991, stating that they would resort to trade union action if discussions were not held within two weeks. A meeting was called in November by R. Paskaralingam, secretary to the treasury and chairman of the Committee for Restructuring Plantations. Unions in the JPTUC submitted a list of nine proposals. While Minister of Plantation Industries Rupa Karunatilake suggested that a collective agreement be signed by unions and management companies, no steps were taken.

After privatization, conditions on the estates did not improve, and the tasks and norms established for workers were excessive. The trade unions stated they would launch a one-day token strike over five demands, including the signing of a collective agreement. This strike came on 26 August 1992 and was a success, despite the CWC working against it.

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga

After President Premadasa was assassinated in 1993, D.B. Wijetunge briefly took over. He was succeeded by Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. She and her late husband Vijaya Kumaratunga had broken ranks with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party in the 1980s, but Chandrika rejoined and won election to be chief minister of the Western Province. She formed a government in 1994, and was then elected president. The Up-Country People's Front of Chandrasekaran, an MP from Nuwara Eliya District, supported her. President Bandaranaike agreed to include the issue of still stateless people in a new draft constitution. She created a new ministry to deal with the needs of the plantation sector, the Ministry of Estate Infrastructure. One goal of this ministry was to introduce single dwelling houses using ministry funds. Other funds would be used to target education. Steps were also taken to open up government jobs to this sector.

Ethnic Violence in Galle

On 27 May 1995 Ven. Matara Kithalagama Seelanlankara Thero was assassinated. Tensions mounted in Galle, with posters appearing in various places denouncing Tamils. Tamil merchants asked the police for protection, but none was given. During the night of 2 June, violence erupted, and 17 Tamil shops were burned (with 4 Sinhalese and 3 Muslim shops also set on fire in the process). President Kumaratunga immediately issued instructions to the authorities to stop the violence. Her actions likely prevented much larger damage and the spread to other areas.¹⁸

Ethnic Violence in Ratnapura

Wewelwatte Estate is situated 25 miles from Ratnapura and is surrounded by villages. In 1998, after several village boys made overtures to a young woman, conflict escalated. Eighteen estate linerrooms were burned, affecting 400 families; two people were killed. An incident in 1993 had been much less severe.¹⁹

In 2001 ethnic violence occurred on Palmgarden Estate, four kilometres from Ratnapura. A villager tried to pursue a love affair with a

young plantation woman, leading to the death of one person. Arson and property damage followed.

In June 2006 estate workers from the two communities assaulted each other on a section of the Pambegama Estate, between Eheliyagoda and Parakaduwa. All worker linerooms were destroyed by fire, affecting 48 families; they moved to the Kandy area.

Endnotes

¹ K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2005), 73.

² *Hansard*.

³ *Hansard*.

⁴ S. Nadesan, *A History of the Up-Country Tamil People* (Kandy: A. Nandalala Publication, 1993), 225.

⁵ "Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Incidents Which Took Place between 13/8/1977 and 15/9/1977," SP Vol. VII of 1980, 269.

⁶ N. Ramachandran, *Foreign Plantation Investment in Ceylon 1898-1958* (Colombo: Central Bank of Ceylon, 1963).

⁷ *Hansard*, Vol. 23, No. 5, col. 713-14.

⁸ *Hansard*, Vol. 23, No. 13, col. 1010.

⁹ Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality, "Year of Racial Violence 1983," 8.

¹⁰ "Stop This Havoc," *Sun*, 12 August 1981, cited in *Tribune*, 22 August 1981, 4.

¹¹ *The Hindu*, 18 August 1981.

¹² *Ceylon Daily News*, 5 September 1981.

¹³ L. Piyadasa, *The Holocaust and After*, 80.

¹⁴ Author interview of Mr. Rajaratnam.

¹⁵ *The Economic Review*, March 1982, 72.

¹⁶ *Christian Worker*, second quarter 1982, 37.

¹⁷ *The Island*.

¹⁸ "Ethnic Violence in Galle" (report of an independent committee of inquiry, 2 June 1995) (Colombo: ICES, August 1995), 7-8.

¹⁹ Information in this section is from S. Vijekumar and M. Chandrakumar, "Inathuwa Muranpadum Malayaka Makkalum" (Colombo: R.R. Sivalingam Memorial Commemoration Committee, 2007), 3-20.

CHAPTER 11

EDUCATION IN THE ESTATE SECTOR

In April 1962 W. Dahanayake, former prime minister and minister of education, commented in parliament on the "Report of the Committee on Non-School Going Children":

According to this report there were (in 1958) 284,000 children between the ages 5 and 14 on the estates. Of them, 125,000 were attending schools and 132,000 were not attending any schools at all. Of 53% majority of them were in the 900-odd schools. They do not teach beyond standard V, and even up to standard V there is no properly organized kindergarten. Many of these schools are without furniture. Teachers are not qualified and they are poorly paid. So from every point of view we have to bow our heads in shame when we think of the way in which we are treating estate children with regard to education. Originally the education of estate children was considered to be the duty of the estate management. Later on, the United National Party Government recognized the principle that the education of estate children should be the responsibility of the State. However, neither the United National Party Government nor the Sri Lanka Freedom Party Government that succeeded it was able to give these children a square deal.¹

Free education from kindergarten to the degree level was introduced in 1945. This included the expansion of schools in rural areas and establishment of central schools by the government, with scholarship schemes providing free board and living, and midday meals, for marginalized groups. However, these measures proved to be meaningless to plantation children; they were unable to access these privileges in the ways other communities could.

Until the 1970s estate schools came under the purview of estate management. Between 1971 and 1977 the state managed them. Facilities afforded to these schools remained minimal and the quality of education unsatisfactory. The school drop-out rate was high, and only 0.1% finished higher education. Literacy rates of the community were very low. There was a lack of teachers in all grades. Preschool teachers were in the form of crèche attendants, often without training and not speaking Tamil. Few teachers were competent to teach at the GC Ordinary Level. Few national schools were established in this sector.

From the late 1980s much was done to improve the quality of education, but these efforts have concentrated on the primary and junior secondary levels. Many more children now complete primary school, but passing rates at GC Ordinary Level remain low. There is especially true in mathematics and the sciences. Failure at this level means that students cannot continue further studies, impacting on employment opportunities. Most cannot imagine pursuing postsecondary or university education. The gap between the plantation and other sectors is marked.

This gap is also noticeable in the area of technical and vocational training. Such education is underdeveloped in the plantation sector, with less priority given to skills development. In addition, what training does exist is often conducted in Sinhala. Students may lack the minimum qualifications required to enroll. Even when qualified, other obstacles include economic factors and transport difficulties.

In a report, the Central Bank stated:

The development of education system to explore new frontiers of knowledge and match it with dynamic needs of the labour market is vital to achieve sustainable high economic growth and development. The education sector of the country mainly consists of general education, vocational education and university education. Though Sri Lanka has excelled in general education, its achievements in the other two areas have been insufficient. Key issues in the education system are related to equity, quality, efficiency and effectiveness. The ten year vision addresses these issues and plans, transforming the education system into one that will promote the technological skills required for rapid economic growth and development. It also aims at promoting

knowledge, values, and attitudes needed by individuals to live in peace and harmony, while raising the intellectual and skills level of the people.²

To achieve this vision the state has to seriously address the difficulties confronting the plantation children in the field of education. The Ministry of Education has identified 150 schools as 'isuru schools' with the objective of developing them to the level of national schools for secondary education in selected divisional secretariat areas, in order to ease the high demand for admission to national schools. However, the number of such schools identified in the plantation sector is minimal.

Endnotes

¹ *Hansard*, Vol. 46, No. 23, 1962, col. 4575.

² Central Bank of Sri Lanka, *Annual Report 1008*, 75.

CHAPTER 12

DEPRIVATION AND POVERTY

The percentage of the population constituting Indian Tamils has been declining due to repatriation and a decline in growth rate. The latter is partly due to officially sponsored family planning services.

Being a corporate sector, the estates function on corporate capital, and still an overwhelming majority of youth enter employment on the estates. However, in recent times many estate youth have opted to seek employment outside the estate sector or to be self-employed.¹ Some are employed in the state sector as teachers and white collar workers. Others work as sales assistants in retail shops, or in the service sector as general workers, room boys or minor employees. Still others work as casual agricultural workers in rural areas, in vegetable production and in the expanding informal sector.

The Indian Tamils are poorly represented in the state, provincial and semigovernment services. According to the "Census of Public and Semi-Government Sector Employment," Indian Tamils comprise 0.2% of workers in the state sector, 0.8% in the provincial public sector and 1.1% in the semigovernment sector.²

One reason given for this gross underrepresentation is that the community lacks the required educational qualifications. However, this reason does not explain their underrepresentation in the lower-level occupations, such as drivers, peons and workers in the transport sector. In the divisional secretariat divisions of Hatton and Nuwara Eliya, Indian Tamils comprise the majority of people, but their employment in government is minimal.

Most Indian Tamils continue to list their permanent address as being on the estate, which impacts voter and household lists. The shift from estate to nonestate employment has tended to not improve occupational status, since many jobs secured are ones that other communities tend not to do.

Poverty in Sri Lanka is generally a rural phenomena (90% of the poor). A majority of them live in the peasant small-holding sector, and are mainly farmers cultivating small plots of land. There are few off-farm sources of income, and many of these constitute casual or semi-farm work. This marginalized rural population is made up of the bulk of estate workers and the unemployed in all sectors.

Poverty among estate workers is due to low income and lack of opportunities for enhancing human development. The global fluctuation in prices of tea and rubber impacts wages, as does any management change in days of work provided. The community also receives inferior services in the fields of healthcare, education, telecommunications, electricity, safe water, sanitation and housing. With regard to housing, ownership is not allowed, and so workers are dependent on the state to improve conditions.

The Samurdhi program is the government's largest capital allocation for poverty alleviation, but only 7% of program beneficiaries are in the plantation sector.

The Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) is engaged in activities regarding housing, sanitation, water supply, education, health, empowerment of women, reduction of alcoholism, child care centres, preschool education and income management. However, these projects do not reach some sections of the plantation community. The Estate Co-operative Societies (EWHCS) provides housing and infrastructure facilities to society members. Many workers have benefitted from this scheme.³

CHAPTER 13

LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

The assistant government agent division, also known as the divisional secretariat division, is the state's civil administrative unit; it coordinates the work of central government departments in the division. The division is subdivided into grama sevaka divisions, each headed by an official called the grama sevaka niladhari.

The grama sevaka niladhari performs the following functions:

- a. civil administration: certify birth and death certificates, register voters, conduct census, certify income, handle land matters, issue identity cards and certificates of residence, solve petty disputes.
- b. implement government programs: assist regarding poverty alleviation programs, including providing details to determine those qualified; role in selecting Samurdhi beneficiaries.
- c. service functions: coordinates between people and higher administrative bodies regarding a range of issues.

Indian origin Tamils live in large numbers in the Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa provinces. Their numbers are concentrated in Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Moneragala, Kandy, Matale, Ratnapura, Kegalle, Kalutara and Colombo districts. Smaller numbers live in Galle and Matara districts, and in the North Western and Eastern provinces. Proportionately, fewer grama sevaka niladharis are appointed in the estate areas.

The following maps and tables show the population figures of all communities in the divisional secretariat divisions and the district electorates of Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Kandy, Matale, Ratnapura and Kegalle.¹

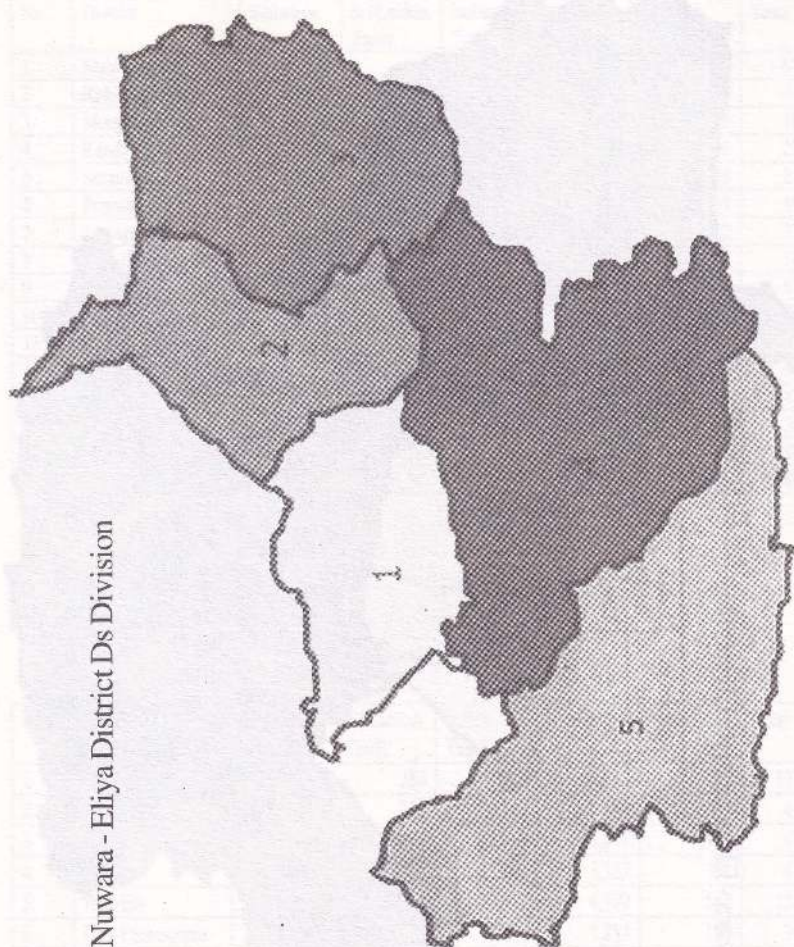
Nuwara Eliya District

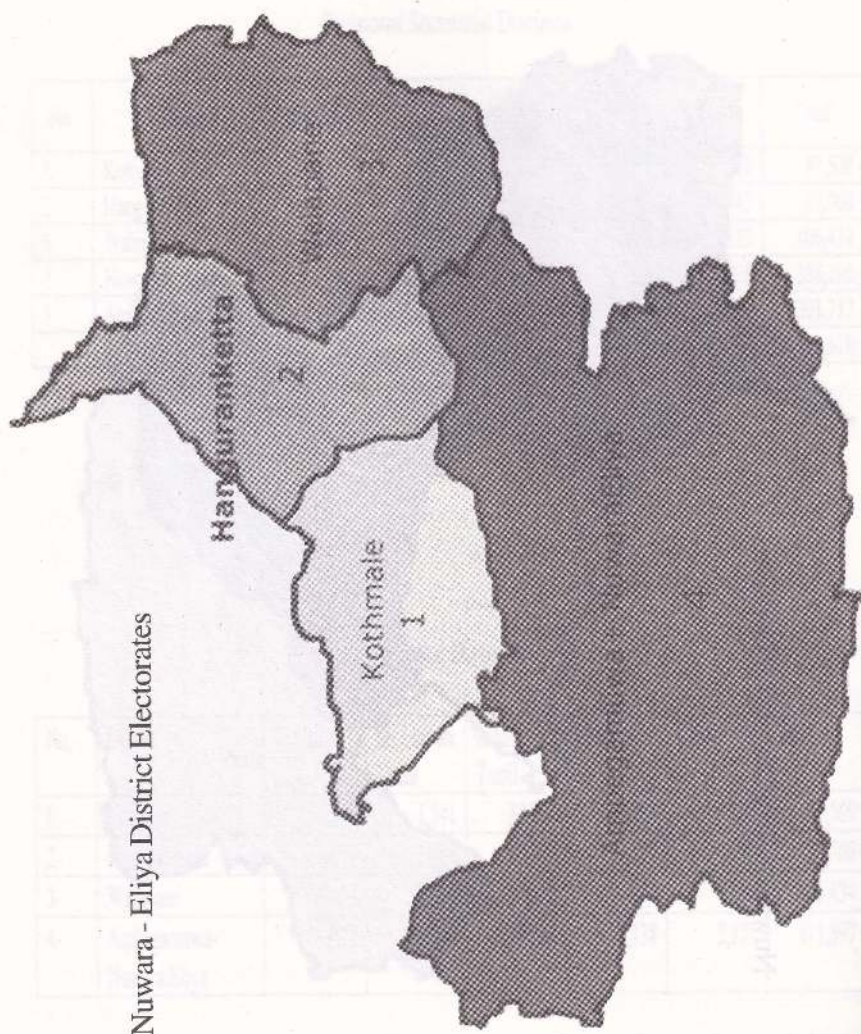
Divisional Secretariat Divisions

No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Kotmale	50,177	3,541	37,282	6,324	185	97,509
2	Hanguranketa	74,873	1,774	10,936	134	43	87,760
3	Walapane	60,003	3,011	34,328	959	133	106,434
4	Nuwara Eliya	44,293	26,336	131,222	5,311	1,028	208,190
5	Ambagamuwa	45,275	11,404	142,062	3,827	1,149	203,717
	District Total	282,621	46,066	355,830	13,555	2,538	703,610

Electoral Divisions

No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Kotmale	50,177	3,541	37,282	6,324	185	97,509
2	Hanguranketa	74,873	1,774	10,936	134	43	87,760
3	Walapane	60,003	3,011	34,328	959	133	106,434
4	Ambagamuwa- Nuwara Eliya	89,558	37,740	273,284	9,138	2,177	411,897





Nuwara - Eliya District Electorates

Badulla District

Divisional Secretariat Divisions

No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Mahiyangana	65,522	86	10	1,643	40	67,301
2	Rideemaliyadde	45,570	102	36	42	9	45,759
3	Meegahakivula	16,402	207	2,010	12	19	18,650
4	Kandaketiya	21,054	163	736	521	20	22,494
5	Soranathota	18,056	735	3,621	273	75	22,760
6	Passara	27,075	2,702	17,078	2,146	189	49,190
7	Lunugala	13,833	1,039	16,914	1,181	112	33,079
8	Badulla	49,257	3,352	10,795	5,774	1,052	70,230
9	Hali-Ela	55,551	5,347	22,971	3,169	438	87,476
10	Uva-Paranagama	64,711	2,232	7,659	1,853	170	76,624
11	Welimada	68,293	3,117	8,582	14,143	264	94,339
12	Bandarawela	43,651	3,399	9,804	2,914	501	60,269
13	Ella	28,093	2,211	10,946	1,540	104	42,894
14	Haputale	27,690	2,370	17,225	3,130	320	50,735
15	Haldummulla	19,994	2,580	15,148	458	43	38,223
	District Total	564,752	29,542	143,535	38,798	3,356	780,083

Electoral Divisions

No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Mahiyangana	111,092	188	46	1,685	49	113,060
2	Kandaketiya	37,456	309	2,746	533	39	41,144
3	Badulla	67,313	4,087	14,416	6,047	1,127	92,990
4	Passara	40,900	3,741	33,992	3,327	301	82,269
5	Hali-Ela	83,644	7,558	33,917	4,709	542	130,370
6	Uva-Paranagama	64,711	2,232	7,659	1,853	170	76,624
7	Welimada	68,293	3,117	8,582	14,143	264	94,399
8	Bandarawela	43,651	3,399	9,804	2,914	510	60,269
9	Haputale	47,684	4,950	32,373	3,588	363	88,958

Kandy District

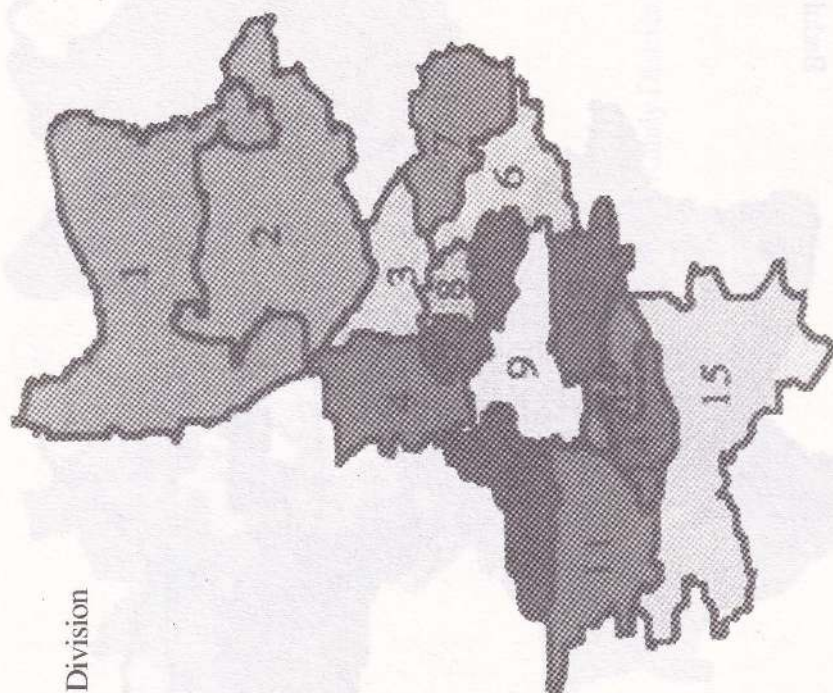
Divisional Secretariat Divisions

No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Thumpane	32,655	194	122	2,438	38	35,447
2	Poojapitiya	44,041	494	1,202	8,384	51	54,172
3	Akurana	17,160	2,038	1,434	34,971	141	55,744
4	Pathadumbara	60,720	2,369	477	16,689	303	80,558
5	Panwila	9,940	984	14,521	1,162	73	26,680
6	Udadumbara	20,703	729	1,162	224	13	22,831
7	Minipe	47,986	64	20	258	10	48,338
8	Medadumbara	43,474	3,426	8,487	3,263	71	58,721
9	Kundasale	88,821	7,371	4,837	5,557	544	107,130
10	Kandy	118,523	12,766	9,223	16,548	3,570	160,630
11	Harispattuwa	68,744	1,393	398	8,147	198	78,880
12	Hatharaliyadda	27,008	175	484	1,430	10	29,107
13	Yatinuwara	87,146	1,384	2,061	4,037	207	97,835
14	Udunuwara	72,563	1,589	1,386	23,243	454	99,235
15	Doluwa	32,476	1,489	9,057	2,171	77	45,270
16	Pathahewaheta	48,347	1,824	2,236	1,362	74	53,843
17	Deltota	11,949	2,897	7,713	7,254	104	29,917
18	Udawalatha	48,683	6,690	13,054	17,155	563	86,145
19	Ganga Ihala Korale	40,648	917	6,167	3,109	289	51,130
20	Nawalapitiya	26,313	3,256	19,581	7,647	565	57,362
	District Total	947,900	52,052	103,622	168,049	7,405	1,279,028

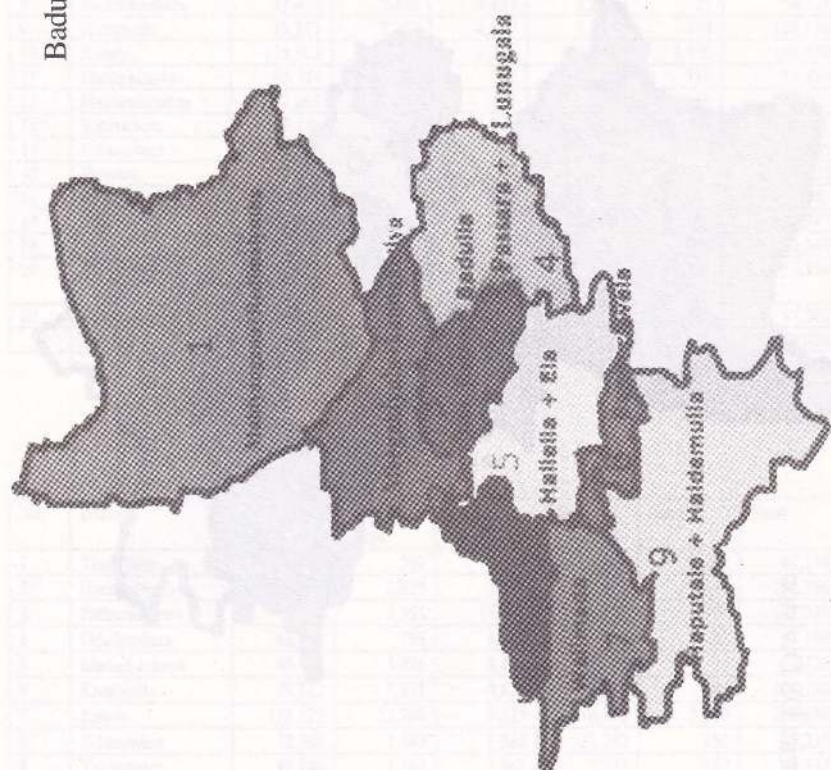
Electoral Divisions

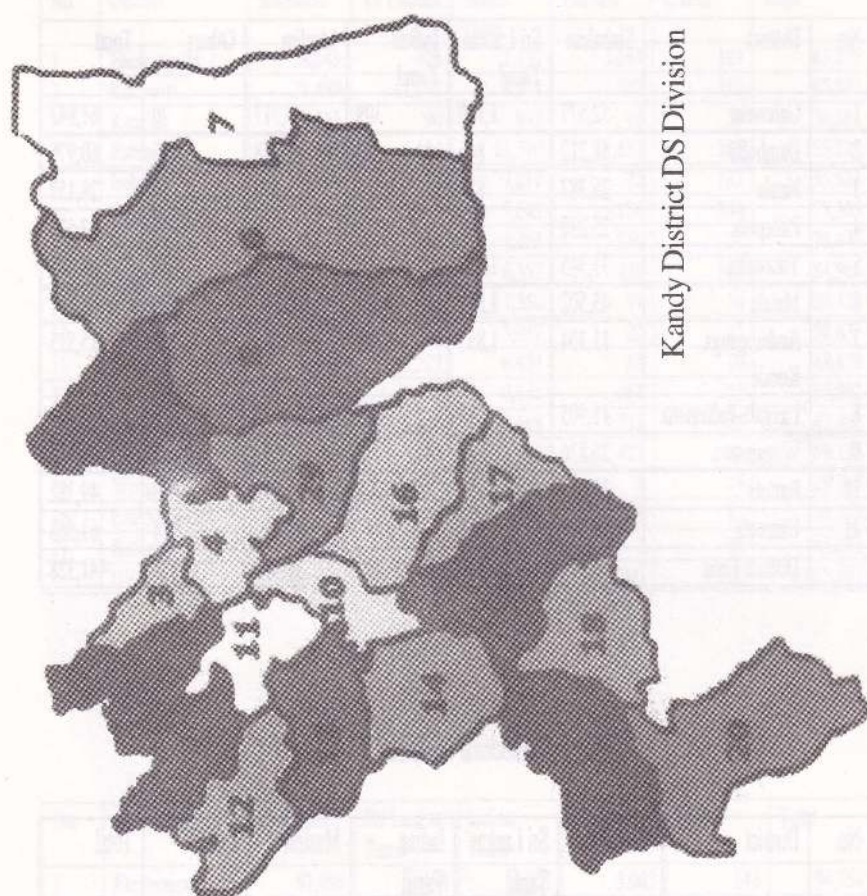
No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Thumpane	59,663	369	606	3,868	48	64,554
2	Harispattuwa	129,945	3,925	3,034	51,502	390	188,796
3	Pathadumbara	70,660	3,353	14,998	17,851	376	107,238
4	Udadumbara	68,689	793	1,182	482	23	71,169
5	Medadumbara	43,474	3,426	8,487	3,263	71	58,721
6	Kundasale	88,821	7,371	4,837	5,557	544	107,130
7	Kandy	118,523	12,766	9,223	16,548	3,570	160,630
8	Udunuwara	72,563	1,589	1,386	23,243	454	99,235
9	Yatinuwara	87,146	1,384	2,061	7,037	207	97,835
10	Deltota	44,425	4,386	16,770	9,425	181	75,187
11	Udawalatha	48,683	6,690	13,054	17,155	563	86,145
12	Nawalapitiya	66,961	4,173	25,748	10,756	854	108,892

Badulla District DS Division



Badulla District Electorates





Kandy District DS Division

Matale District

Divisional Secretariat Divisions

No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Galewela	52,577	1,169	309	7,717	70	61,842
2	Dambulla	58,212	846	54	1,788	76	60,976
3	Naula	26,387	842	521	397	10	28,157
4	Pallepola	25,232	549	772	958	9	27,520
5	Yatawatte	33,345	1,059	2,168	2,022	54	28,648
6	Matale	45,502	8,865	3,981	12,477	626	68,451
7	Ambanganga Korale	11,304	1,857	2,293	55	6	15,515
8	Laggala-Pallegama	11,905	44	442	3	5	12,399
9	Wilgamuwa	26,836	14	2	11	7	26,870
10	Rattota	35,001	5,452	6,904	1,818	207	49,382
11	Ukuwela	40,278	3,623	6,047	11,216	404	61,568
	District Total	353,579	24,320	23,493	38,462	1,474	441,328

Electoral Divisions

No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Dambulla	110,789	2,015	363	9,505	146	122,818
2	Laggala- Pallegama	65,128	900	965	411	22	67,426
3	Matale	91,079	10,473	6,921	15,457	689	124,619
4	Rattota	86,583	10,932	15,244	13,089	617	126,465

Ratnapura District

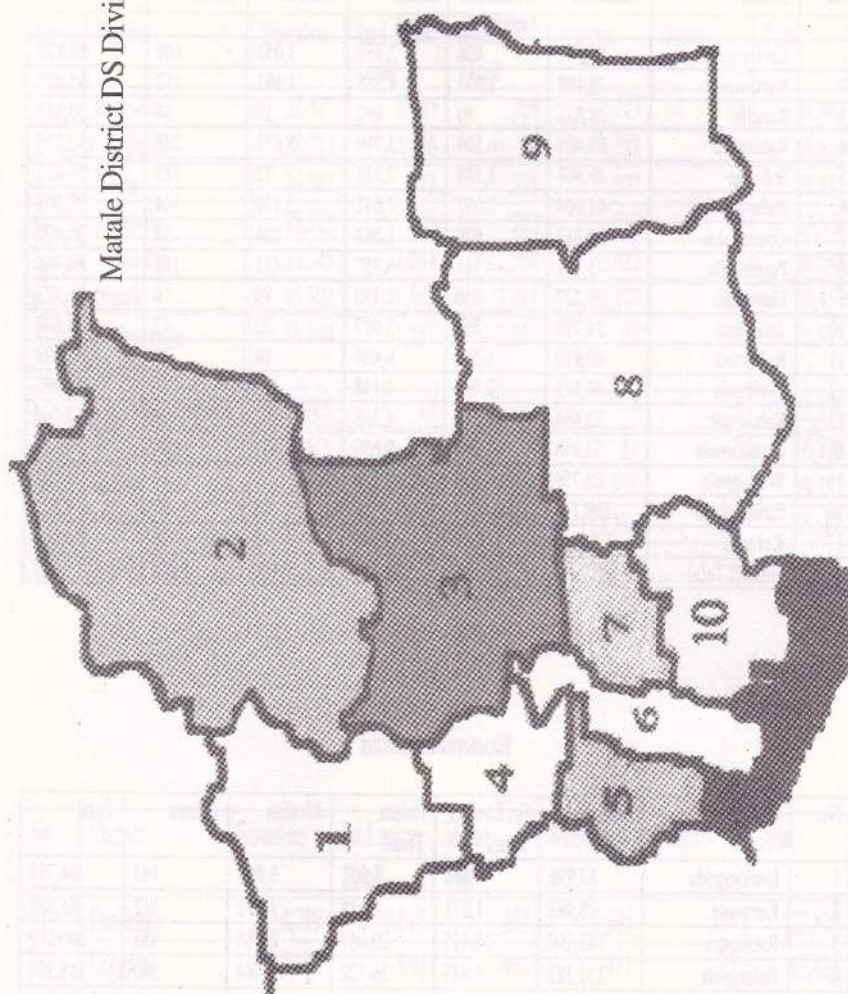
Divisional Secretariat Divisions

No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Eheliyagoda	58,141	408	2,159	3,053	109	63,870
2	Kuruwita	78,489	1,071	4,518	1,692	112	85,882
3	Kiriella	29,855	90	892	10	34	30,881
4	Ratnapura	89,489	6,104	13,710	5,633	287	155,223
5	Imbulpe	46,961	1,188	7,217	72	183	55,621
6	Balangoda	61,104	3,037	7,642	5,176	344	77,303
7	Opanayake	23,317	620	1,263	236	34	25,470
8	Pelmadulla	73,701	4,311	6,357	431	166	84,966
9	Elapatha	34,227	640	1,350	89	16	36,322
10	Ayagama	24,793	763	3,017	22	42	28,637
11	Kalawana	40,810	1,277	6,454	68	70	48,679
12	Nivitigala	47,549	2,783	8,148	461	151	59,092
13	Kahawatte	32,464	2,316	6,368	1,232	88	42,468
14	Godakawela	53,858	3,087	9,659	2,437	82	69,123
15	Weligepola	28,759	170	156	3	14	29,102
16	Embilipitiya	199,184	158	66	68	87	119,563
17	Kolonna	39,316	717	3,615	7	38	43,693
	District Total	882,017	28,740	82,591	20,690	1,769	1,015,807

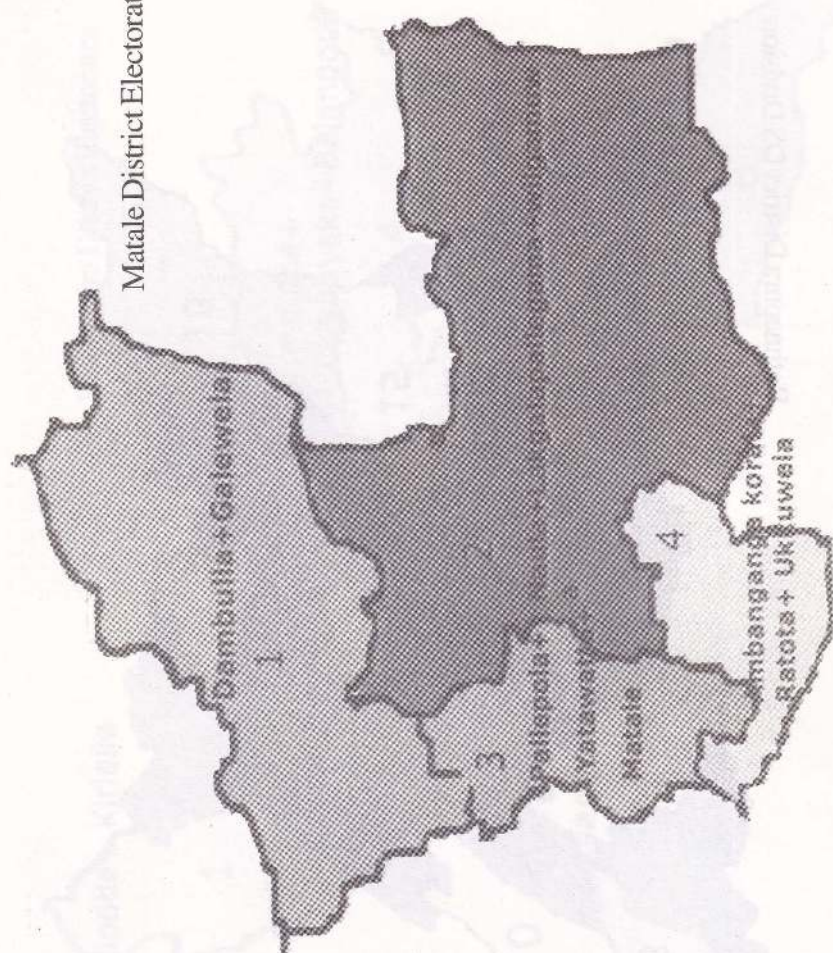
Electoral Divisions

No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Eheliyagoda	87,996	498	3,051	3,063	143	94,751
2	Kuruwita	78,489	1,071	4,518	1,692	112	85,882
3	Ratnapura	163,190	10,415	20,067	6,064	453	200,189
4	Balangoda	131,382	4,845	16,122	5,484	561	158,394
5	Nivitigala	114,240	5,739	15,866	1,782	255	137,882
6	Kalawana	65,603	2,404	9,471	90	112	77,316
7	Weligepola	82,617	3,257	9,815	2,440	96	98,225
8	Kolonna	158,500	875	3,681	75	125	163,256

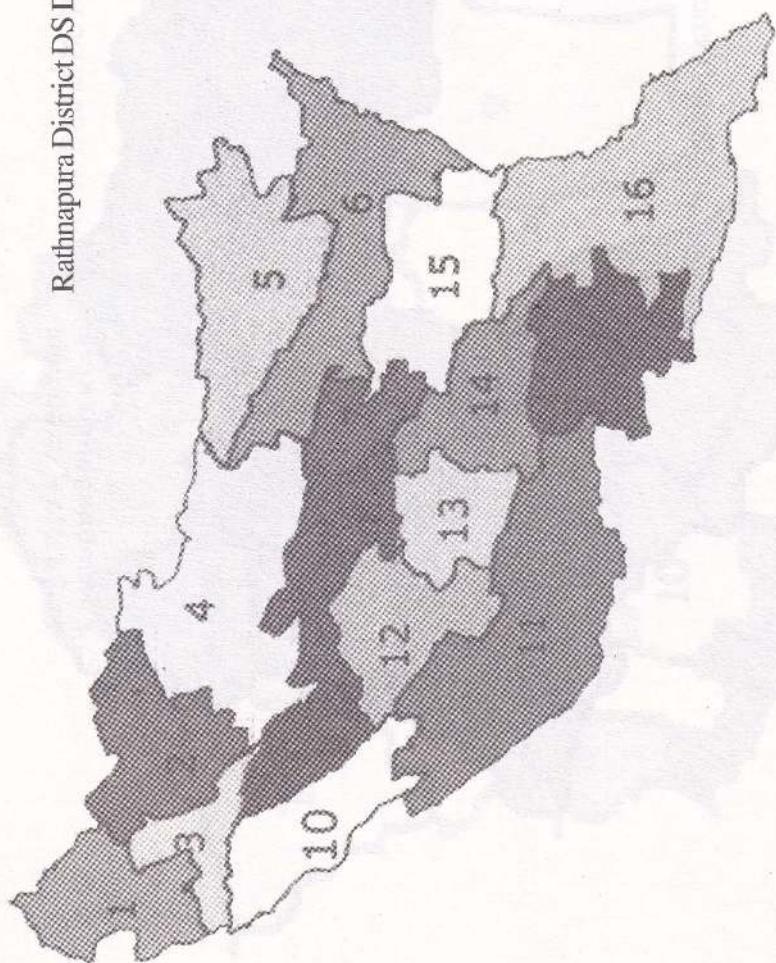
Matale District DS Division



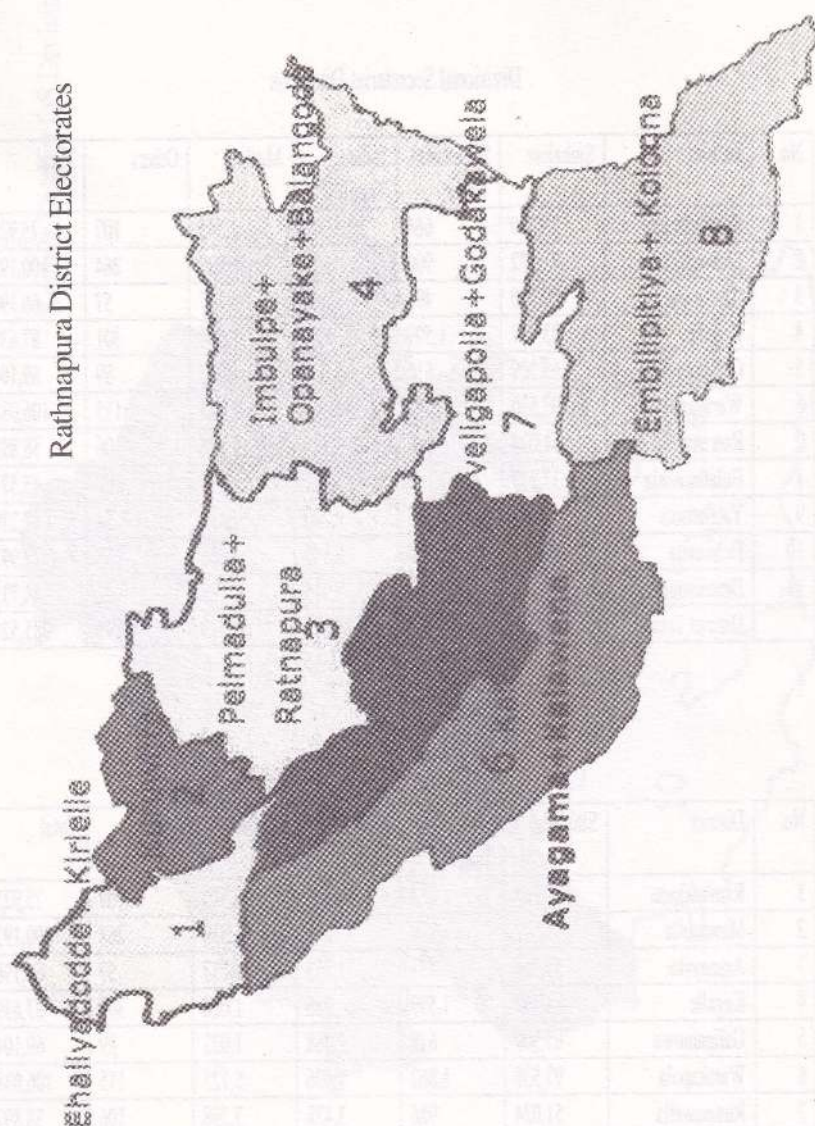
Matale District Electorates



Rathnapura District DS Division



Rathnapura District Electorates



Kegalla District

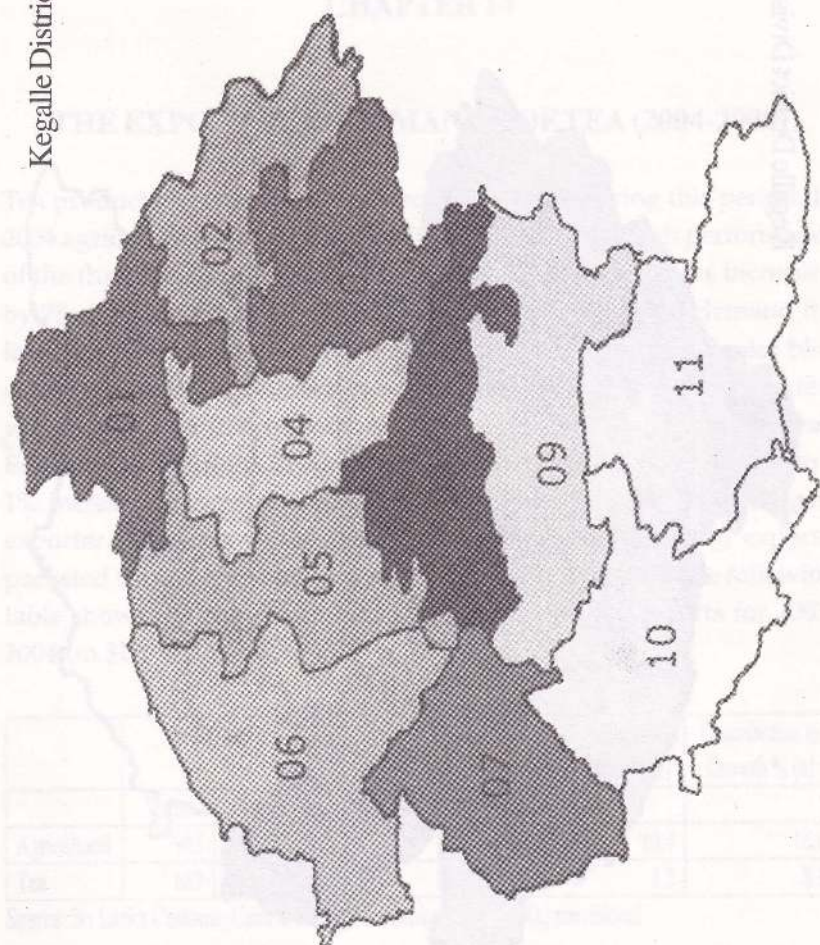
Divisional Secretariat Divisions

No.	District	Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Muslim	Others	Total
1	Rambukkana	72,269	664	340	2,545	107	75,925
2	Mawanella	71,572	900	617	26,839	264	100,192
3	Aranayake	59,760	491	1,153	4,737	57	66,198
4	Kegalle	83,747	1,599	986	1,004	301	87,639
5	Galigamuwa	65,309	616	2,068	1,002	89	69,104
6	Warakapola	97,530	1,862	1,406	5,125	115	106,038
7	Ruwanwella	51,024	986	3,478	3,298	106	58,892
8	Bulathsinhala	37,217	2,167	5,929	192	68	45,573
9	Yatiyantota	42,362	2,637	9,770	2,412	58	57,239
10	Dehiowita	59,419	2,713	8,540	3,186	133	73,991
11	Deraniyagala	34,456	273	9,915	59	32	44,735
	District Total	647,665	14,908	44,202	50,419	191	785,524

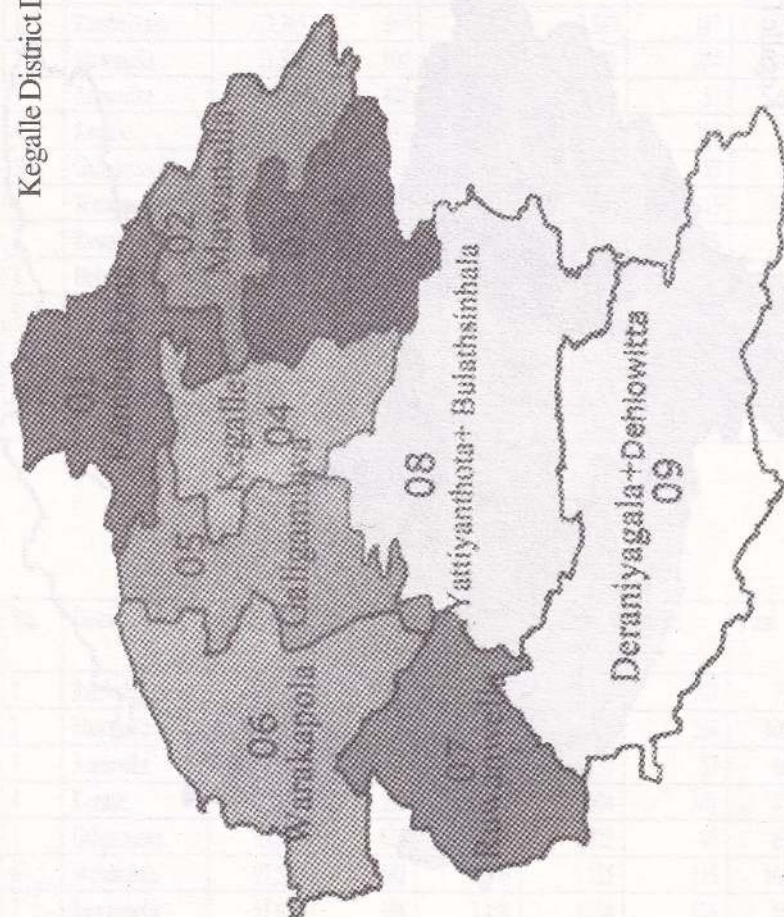
Electoral Divisions

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6	Warakapola	97,530	1,862	1,406	5,125	115	106,038
7	Ruwanwella	51,024	986	3,478	3,298	106	58,892
8	Yatiyantota	79,579	4,804	15,699	2,604	126	102,812
9	Deraniyagala	93,875	2,986	18,455	3,245	165	118,726

Kegalle District DS Division



Kegalle District Division



CHAPTER 14

THE EXPORT PERFORMANCE OF TEA (2004-2009)

Tea products were a primary source of revenue during this period. In 2004 agricultural exports grew by 10%, reflecting the high performance of the three major crops: tea, rubber and coconut. Tea prices increased by 75 cents to US\$ 2.46 per kilo, mainly due to increased demand for low grown tea from the Middle East, Russia and former Soviet bloc countries. Russia continued to be the largest buyer of Sri Lankan tea, with a share of 19% of total exports, followed by the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. The moderate growth in tea production led to a 1% increase in exports. Still, Kenya overtook Sri Lanka as the largest exporter. There was a decrease in the share of value added exports, packeted tea and green tea exports, due to lower demand.¹ The following table shows the composition of agricultural and tea exports for 2003-2004 (in \$US millions).

	2003		2004 (a)		Change in Value (a)	Growth Rate % (a)	Contribution to Growth % (a)
	Value	Share	Value	Share			
Agricultural	965	19	1,065	19	100	10.4	16.0
Tea	683	13	739	13	56	8.2	8.9

Source: Sri Lanka Customs; Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

(a) provisional

Agricultural exports grew by 8.3% in 2005, reflecting a 2.9% increase in volume and a 5.3% increase in price. Tea was the main reason for this growth. About 309 kilos of tea were exported, and prices were very

high. The largest buyers were Russia, United Arab Emirates and Syria; others included Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.² The following table shows agricultural and tea export figures for 2004-2005.

	2004		2005 (a)		Change in Value (a)	Growth Rate % (a)	Contribution to Growth % (a)
	Value	Share	Value	Share			
Agricultural	1,065.2	18.5	1,153.8	18.2	88.6	8.3	15.0
Tea	738.9	12.8	810.2	12.8	71.3	9.6	12.1

Source: Sri Lanka Customs; Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

(a) provisional

During 2006 Sri Lanka benefitted from a global supply shortage, which was due to drought in Kenya and greater demand in Russia/former bloc countries and the Middle East. Value added exports declined due to fewer exports to Jordan, Iraq and Libya.³ The following table gives figures for 2005-2006.

	2005		2006 (a)		Change in Value (a)	Growth Rate % (a)	Contribution to Growth % (a)
	Value	Share	Value	Share			
Agricultural	1,153.8	18.2	1,292.7	18.8	138.9	12.0	25.8
Tea	810.2	12.8	881.2	12.8	71.0	8.8	13.2

Source: Sri Lanka Customs; Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

(a) provisional

Due to the oversupply of tea, priority was given to enhancing quality. The Tea Development Project oversaw the provision of low interest credit facilities for the modernization of tea factories, to enable Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point certification. About 34 out of 661 tea factories have been certified by the Sri Lanka Standards Institute and other recognized institutions. In order to increase the production of cut, tear and curl (CTC) and value added tea, the Sri Lanka Tea Board allowed additional CTC processing lines in existing factories.⁴

Earnings from tea exports reached a record level in 2007, exceeding \$US 1 billion, due to high demand; 24% of tea exports went to the Middle East, and 50% to Russia/former bloc countries. Reasons

for increased demand in these countries included rising income and rising oil prices. The Central Bank stated in 2007: "Increased unionized action in the tea sector meanwhile remains an issue of concern, given that it can affect the long run viability of companies producing tea as well as the competitiveness of tea exported from Sri Lanka in international markets."⁵

In 2008 tea export earnings totalled \$US 1.271 billion, mainly due to high prices. In addition, there was a great demand from the Middle East due to uncertainties in Kenya. During this period of high demand, producers started to provide lower quality tea. The export share to the Middle East was 46% and to Russia/former bloc countries 23%. Due to the global economic crisis, tea prices declined in September and continued to decline thereafter. Suppliers and manufacturers could not recover costs, and some stocks remained unsold at auction. The government then intervened through he Sri Lanka Tea Board and bought up stocks, which were then sold in early 2009. In order to ensure the high quality associated with Sri Lanka tea, the board took measures to assure compliance with standards.⁶ The following table shows figures for 2007-2008.

The

	2007 (a)		2008 (b)		Change in Value (b)	Growth Rate % (b)	Contribution to Growth % (b)
	Value	Share	Value	Share			
Agricultural	1,507.2	19.7	1,854.8	22.8	347.6	23.1	70.0
Tea	1,025.2	13.4	1,271.5	15.6	246.3	24.0	49.6

Source: Sri Lanka Customs; Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

(a) revised

(b) provisional

According to the Central Bank report for 2009 there was an improvement in the performance of agricultural exports during the last quarter of the year, led by high prices for tea. Tea exports accounted for 16.7% of earnings. Earnings, however, declined by 6.8% to \$US 1.185 billion due to a drop in export volume. In 2009 Sri Lanka was the third largest producer of tea, after Kenya and China. The shortage in the world

market, as well as measures in Sri Lanka to assure quality, kept prices high. Sri Lanka exports 57.8% of tea in bulk form, at an average price of \$US 3.67 per kilo; value added tea exports are priced at \$US 5.36-7.53 per kilo. To assure sustainability of the tea industry, the government placed a cess of Rs. 4 per kilo on imported teas, in order to prevent blending.⁷ The following table gives figures for 2008-2009.

	2008 (a)		2009 (b)		Change in Value (b)	Growth Rate % (b)	Contribution to Growth % (b)
	Value	Share	Value	Share			
Agricultural	1,854.8	22.9	1,690.3	23.9	-164.5	-8.9	16.0
Tea	1,271.5	15.7	1,185.1	16.7	-86.4	-6.8	8.4

Source: Sri Lanka Customs; Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

(a) revised

(b) provisional

Endnotes

¹ Central Bank Report (Colombo: Central Bank, 2005), 84.

² Central Bank Report (Colombo: Central Bank, 2006), 80.

³ Central Bank Report (Colombo: Central Bank, 2007), 102.

⁴ Central Bank Report (Colombo: Central Bank, 2007).

⁵ Central Bank Report (Colombo: Central Bank, 2008).

⁶ Central Bank Report (Colombo: Central Bank, 2009).

⁷ Central Bank Report (Colombo: Central Bank, 2010).

CHAPTER 15

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE PLANTATION WORKERS

In 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit, world leaders considered the many problems facing poorer countries and decided that assistance should be given for their upliftment. Assistance would focus on the elimination of poverty, illiteracy, hunger, disease, environmental degradation and discrimination against women; in each area millennium development goals (MDG) were set. In the Asian region poverty looms large, with many people living below the poverty line. Governments in the region have followed neoliberal economic policies, which have not served to help the marginalized sections of people.

It has to be observed that global capital will always wind its way to the poorer nations to exploit the mass of people and make them poorer. Historically the rich nations have exploited poorer nations, aiming to trade their products. These neoliberal policies followed by the ruling classes of the poorer nations will thwart the attainment of the MDG. Dependence on the World Bank and International Monetary Fund will mean following policies which cause immense hardship to the poorer strata of the populace.

Sri Lanka, given its dismal economic performance, will not be able to achieve the MDG by the target date of 2015, and this is especially true with regard to the plantation community. In order to empower workers, the wage structure should be improved, but in today's context employers will be reluctant to do so. Instead, poverty among workers has

increased, and the current cost of living will be an added burden, and one which will lead to hunger.

Although primary level education is compulsory, some parents send their children to work as domestics, due to economic reasons. There is likely no way to prevent this. Gender equality in the sector remains only in words; trade unions and civil society need to work together on this.

The reduction of child mortality is crucial, but Central Bank figures are unclear on this. Similarly, there is no clear monitoring of maternal health.

In order to combat diseases, hospital facilities must be improved. Now, estate hospitals fall under the national system, where there is a general shortage of drugs and necessary facilities.

Thus, trade unions, nongovernmental organizations and civil society in the plantations must engage in serious discussions on how to improve conditions. Politicians and bureaucrats must be enlightened as to the MDG as they relate to the grievances of the plantation community.

CONCLUSION

The period covered in this book starts from the arrival to the island of the downtrodden people from south India to work on the coffee, tea and rubber estates. It would be superfluous to mention the tough and grueling circumstances under which they arrived and lived as serfs in primitive and appalling conditions, divested of all basic human rights and liberties, and dictated to by the *kangany*. The liberation from the *kangany* influence and the beginning of a formulation of demands dates to about 1927, when legislation was passed concerning the minimum wage.

It was seen how during British colonial times the *kangany* brought workers and earned his pence money, paid by the colonial superintendent for each day a worker laboured. Today, due to the Industrial Disputes Act, the *kangany* is an ordinary worker.

The plantation workers were segregated, with superintendents seeking to exclude influence from the outside. When there were strikes in urban areas, plantation workers were even prohibited from visiting the local bazaars.

With the trade union activities of Natesa Aiyar, awareness among workers grew. It is noteworthy that it was the ideas of the left movement that had the most impact in the plantations, not the religious reform movements of Rammohan Roy (Brahmo Samaj) or the teachings of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsar and Swami Vivekananda, or the revivalist activities of Arumuga Navalar or Vipulanda Adigal.

By fighting for their rights, plantation workers won many demands, resulting in the passage of such legislation as the Minimum Wage Ordinance, Indian Labour Ordinance, Industrial Disputes Act, Workmen's Compensation Act, Wages Boards Ordinance, Termination

of Employment Act, Employees Provident Fund Act, Employees Trust Fund, Trade Union Ordinance and Maternity Benefits Ordinance.

With private companies now managing the tea plantations there have been many changes in the lives of plantation workers. New classes have evolved and new vistas have been discovered; many in today's generations do not intend to work on the estates. There are no restrictions on place of work, and people are joining white collar employment and are migrating. Consumerism has changed outlooks. As Marx and Engels said in *The Communist Manifesto*, with the growth of capitalism many innovative and advanced changes take place in society, and correspondingly global capital has extended its tentacles to Sri Lanka; predatory capitalism exploits all sectors of the working class.

People on the estates have lived in barrack-type housing. Various governments promised to turn over ownership to them, and to hand over land ownership for the construction of houses, but until recently this did not happen. It would now be prudent to encourage the Workers Housing Trust in its construction of living quarters, and to provide land. Land and housing are now in an acute condition, and many people are facing charges of encroachment under the State Lands Recovery of Possession Act. The government should take remedial action to rectify irregularities and grant redress.

The 22 regional tea companies are charged with the protection of the tea industry, including care of tea lands. However, inputs are often minimal, even though tea is still an important foreign exchange earner.

It is the responsibility of the government to initiate discussions on the redemarcation of the existing pradeshiya sabhas, so that the plantation community can participate in local government.

It is the responsibility of the state and representatives of plantation workers to consider and act on the issues and questions which have yet to be solved.

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The signboard presently seen on Loolcandura Estate. Maxwell Fernando. *The Story of Ceylon Tea* (Colombo: Mlesna Limited, 2000).

Site of James Taylor's log cabin. S. Muthiah, *The Indo-Lankans, Their Two Hundred Year Saga* (Colombo: Indian Heritage Foundation, 2003).

The coffee is dried in the sun ... S. Muthiah, *The Indo-Lankans, Their Two Hundred Year Saga* (Colombo: Indian Heritage Foundation, 2003).

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Tea pluckers in the early days. S. Muthiah, *The Indo-Lankans, Their Two Hundred Year Saga* (Colombo: Indian Heritage Foundation, 2003).

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The maps of district divisions and district electorates are from: P.P. Devaraj, *Constitutional Electoral Reform Proposals and Indian Origin Tamils* (Colombo: Foundation for Social Change, 2006).

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Mr. A.P. Kanapathypillai, attorney-at-law, is a practising lawyer. He is a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, president of the United Plantation Workers Union and vice-president of the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, an affiliate of the Communist Party.

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